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UNITED STATES-VIETNAM RELATIONS  
1945-1967

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STUDY PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE



Printed for the use of the House Committee on Armed Services

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WASHINGTON : 1971

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## INTRODUCTION

The following is the unclassified text of the 1968 Department of Defense study, "United States Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," popularly known as the Pentagon Papers.

At the time the existence of this study became known, through unauthorized public disclosures, the Committee on Armed Services requested a copy of the study, which was provided to the Committee and which has been continually available for inspection by Members of Congress. At the same time, as Chairman of the Armed Services Committee and with the concurrence of the senior minority member, Rep. Leslie C. Arends, I asked the Department of Defense to declassify the study on an expedited basis so that it could be made available to Members of Congress and to the American people.

I am now directing that it be printed as a Committee document and that a copy be provided to each Member of the House of Representatives. Copies will also be on sale to the public at the Government Printing Office. The 12-volume text here contains the first 43 volumes of the original 47-volume study. The last four volumes have not as yet been declassified because they deal with negotiations which are still in progress.

F. EDW. HÉBERT, *Chairman,*  
*Committee on Armed Services.*



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
*Washington, D.C., September 20, 1971.*

Honorable F. EDWARD HÉBERT,  
*Chairman, Committee on Armed Services*  
*House of Representatives*  
*Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: In accordance with the discussions which took place at the time of the delivery to the Congress of the classified version of the 47-volume 1968 study of "U.S. Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," we are transmitting herewith for your use four sets of the declassified study. You will note that the declassified review contains 43 volumes. The last four volumes of the 47-volume set have not been declassified because they deal exclusively with sensitive negotiations seeking peace and the release of prisoners of war. Their disclosure would adversely affect continuing efforts to achieve those objectives.

As I am sure you can appreciate, the review of approximately 7,000 pages has been a difficult task, complicated by the pattern of prior unauthorized disclosures and pending and potential actions in the courts. Of course, some of the material has been declassified solely on the basis of prior disclosures. The review has been accomplished on an expedited basis in order to comply with your request for the material on a declassified basis for hearings which the Congress has indicated are in prospect. Because of the time constraint imposed on the review, it is possible, even probable, that errors of omission and commission have been made during the review. This, however, represents the best possible effort taking into consideration the time available and the numerous complicating factors which influenced the review. Other than the last four volumes, we have been able to make available to you in unclassified form the bulk of the study.

Sincerely,

RADY A. JOHNSON,  
*Assistant to the Secretary for Legislative Affairs.*



**FINAL REPORT—OSD Task Force, Vietnam  
and  
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## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

### MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THROUGH: Mr. Paul C. Warnke, ASD/ISA

Dr. Morton H. Halperin, DASD/Policy Planning and Arms Control/ISA

SUBJECT: Final Report, OSD Vietnam Task Force

*15 January 1969.*

On June 17, 1967, Secretary Robert S. McNamara directed that a Task Force be formed to study the history of United States involvement in Vietnam from World War II to the present. Mr. McNamara's guidance was simply to do studies that were "encyclopedic and objective." With six full-time professionals assigned to the Task Force, we were to complete our work in three months. A year and a half later, and with the involvement of six times six professionals, we are finally done to the tune of thirty-seven studies and fifteen collections of documents contained in forty-three volumes.

In the beginning, Mr. McNamara gave the Task Force full access to OSD files, and the Task Force received access to CIA materials, and some use of State Department cables and memoranda. We had no access to White House files. Our guidance prohibited personal interviews with any of the principal participants.

The result was not so much a documentary history, as a history based solely on documents—checked and rechecked with ant-like diligence. Pieces of paper, formidable and suggestive by themselves, could have meant much or nothing. Perhaps this document was never sent anywhere, and perhaps that one, though commented upon, was irrelevant. Without the memories of people to tell us, we were certain to make mistakes. Yet, using those memories might have been misleading as well. This approach to research was bound to lead to distortions, and distortions we are sure abound in these studies.

To bring the documents to life, to fill in gaps, and just to see what the "outside world" was thinking, we turned to newspapers, periodicals, and books. We never used these sources to supplant the classified documents, but only to supplement them. And because these documents, sometimes written by very clever men who knew so much and desired to say only a part and sometimes written very openly but also contradictorily, are not immediately self-revealing or self-explanatory, we tried

both to have a number of researchers look at them and to quote passages liberally. Moreover, when we felt we could be challenged with taking something out of context, we included the whole paper in the Documentary Record section of the Task Force studies (Parts V and VI. A and B). Again seeking to fend off inevitable mistakes in interpretation and context, what seemed to us key documents were reviewed and included in several overlapping in substance, but separate, studies.

The people who worked on the Task Force were superb—uniformly bright and interested, although not always versed in the art of research. We had a sense of doing something important and of the need to do it right. Of course, we all had our prejudices and axes to grind and these shine through clearly at times, but we tried, we think, to suppress or compensate for them.

These outstanding people came from everywhere—the military services, State, OSD, and the "think tanks." Some came for a month, for three months, for six months, and most were unable, given the unhappiness of their superiors, to finish the studies they began. Almost all the studies had several authors, each heir dutifully trying to pick up the threads of his predecessor. In all, we had thirty-six professionals working on these studies, with an average of four months per man.

The quality, style and interest of the studies varies considerably. The papers in Parts I, II, III, and IV.A, concerning the years 1945 to 1961 tend to be generally non-startling—although there are many interesting tidbits. Because many of the documents in this period were lost or not kept (except for the Geneva Conference era) we had to rely more on outside resources. From 1961 onwards (Parts IV.B and C and VI.C), the records were bountiful, especially on the first Kennedy year in office, the Diem coup, and on the subjects of the deployment of ground forces, the decisions surrounding the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, US-GVN relations, and attempts at negotiating a settlement of the conflict.



Almost all the studies contain both a Summary and Analysis and a Chronology. The chronologies highlight each important event or action in the monograph by means of date, description, and documentary source. The Summary and Analysis sections, which I wrote, attempt to capture the main themes and facts of the monographs—and to make some judgments and speculations which may or may not appear in the text itself. The monographs themselves stick, by and large, to the documents and do not tend to be analytical.

Writing history, especially where it blends into current events, especially where that current event is Vietnam, is a treacherous exercise. We could not go into the minds of the decision-makers, we were

not present at the decisions, and we often could not tell whether something happened because someone decided it, decided against it, or most likely because it unfolded from the situation. History, to me, has been expressed by a passage from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* where he writes: "This is a world of chance, free will, and necessity—all interweavingly working together as one; chance by turn rules either and has the last featuring blow at events." Our studies have tried to reflect this thought; inevitably in the organizing and writing process, they appear to assign more and less to men and free will than was the case.

LESLIE H. GELB,  
*Chairman, OSD Task Force.*

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LESLIE H. GELB,  
*Chairman, OSD Task Force.*





# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

I

VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES

1940 - 1950

PART I.

VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES

1940 - 1950

Foreword

This portion of the study treats U.S. policy towards Vietnam in the decade of World War II and its aftermath. It is subdivided into three essays. Section A describes U.S. policy toward Indochina, and the developing conflict between France and the Viet Minh as viewed from Washington. Section B analyzes the character and power of the Viet Minh and probes the role of Vietnamese communists within the Viet Minh. Section C discusses Ho Chi Minh's political development to assess his potentiality for adopting neutrality in the East-West confrontation. Each monograph is supported by the maps and charts tabulated below.

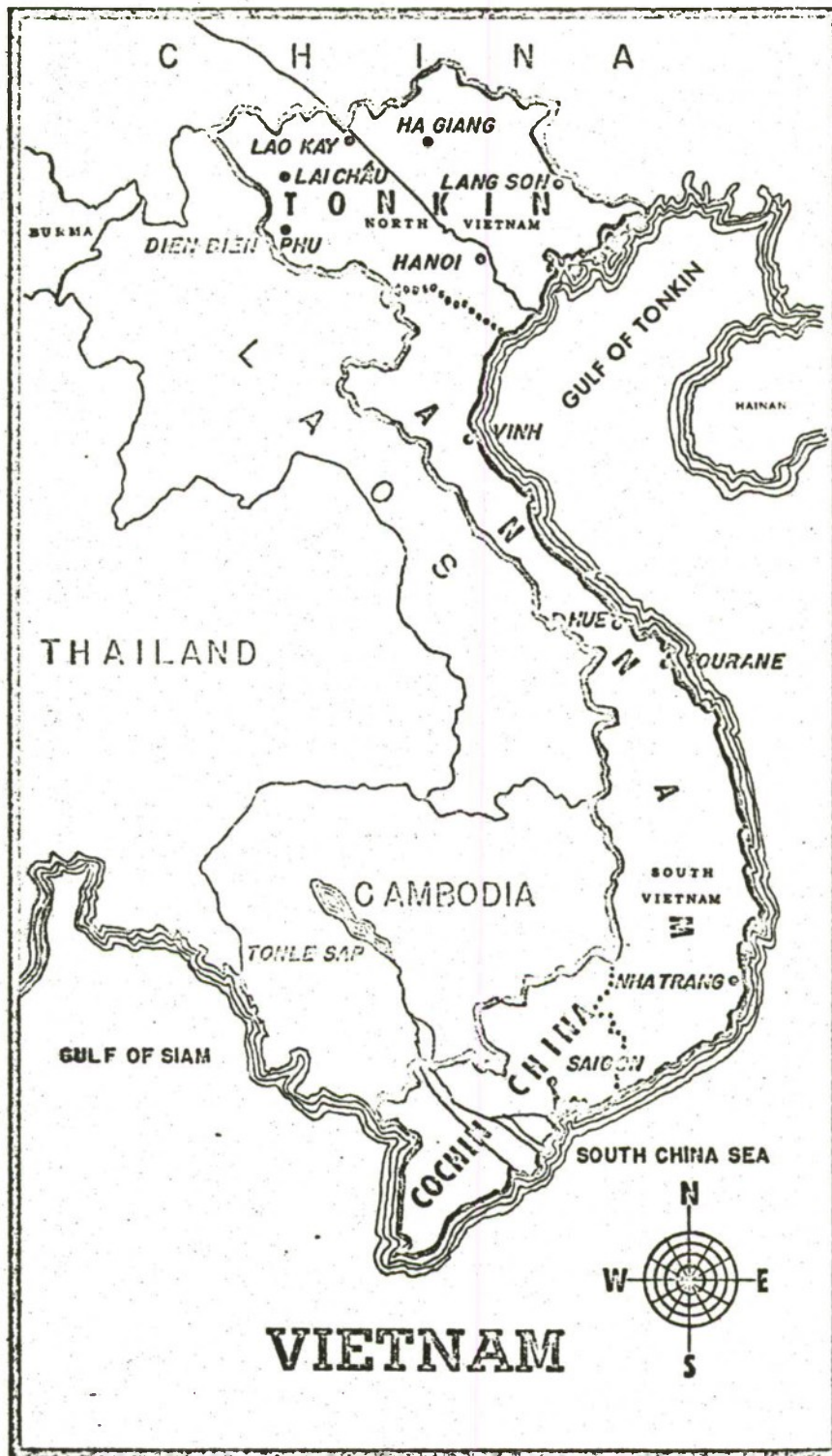
Section A - U.S. Policy, 1940-1950

Section B - The Character and Power of the Viet Minh

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Maps and Charts  
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Extent Viet Minh Control, 1949  
Ho Chi Minh Chronology



Source: Cooper, Killigrew, and LaCharite',  
Case Studies in Insurgency and  
Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam  
1941-1954 (Washington: SORO, 1964)



SUMMARY

Significant misunderstanding has developed concerning U.S. policy towards Indochina in the decade of World War II and its aftermath. A number of historians have held that anti-colonialism governed U.S. policy and actions up until 1950, when containment of communism supervened. For example, Bernard Fall (e.g. in his 1967 post-mortem book, Last Reflections On a War) categorized American policy toward Indochina in six periods: "(1) Anti-Vichy, 1940-1945; (2) Pro-Viet Minh, 1945-1946; (3) Non-involvement, 1946 - June 1950; (4) Pro-French, 1950 - July 1954; (5) Non-military involvement, 1954 - November 1961; (6) Direct and full involvement, 1961 - ." Commenting that the first four periods are those "least known even to the specialist," Fall developed the thesis that President Roosevelt was determined "to eliminate the French from Indochina at all costs," and had pressured the Allies to establish an international trusteeship to administer Indochina until the nations there were ready to assume full independence. This obdurate anti-colonialism, in Fall's view, led to cold refusal of American aid for French resistance fighters, and to a policy of promoting Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh as the alternative to restoring the French bonds. But, the argument goes, Roosevelt died, and principle faded; by late 1946, anti-colonialism mutated into neutrality. According to Fall: "Whether this was due to a deliberate policy in Washington or, conversely, to an absence of policy, is not quite clear....The United States, preoccupied in Europe, ceased to be a diplomatic factor in Indochina until the outbreak of the Korean War." In 1950, anti-communism asserted itself, and in a remarkable volte-face, the United States threw its economic and military resources behind France in its war against the Viet Minh. Other commentators, conversely -- prominent among them, the historians of the Viet Minh -- have described U.S. policy as consistently condoning and assisting the reimposition of French colonial power in Indochina, with a concomitant disregard for the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese.

Neither interpretation squares with the record; the United States was less concerned over Indochina, and less purposeful than either assumes. Ambivalence characterized U.S. policy during World War II, and was the root of much subsequent misunderstanding. On the one hand, the U.S. repeatedly reassured the French that its colonial possessions would be returned to it after the war. On the other hand, the U.S. broadly committed itself in the Atlantic Charter to support national self-determination, and President Roosevelt personally and vehemently advocated independence for Indochina. F.D.R. regarded Indochina as a flagrant example of onerous colonialism which should be turned over to a trusteeship rather than returned to France. The President discussed this proposal with the Allies at the Cairo, Teheran, and Yalta Conferences and received the endorsement of Chiang Kai-shek and Stalin; Prime Minister Churchill demurred.



At one point, Fall reports, the President offered General de Gaulle Filipino advisers to help France establish a "more progressive policy in Indochina" -- which offer the General received in "pensive silence."

Ultimately, U.S. policy was governed neither by the principles of the Atlantic Charter, nor by the President's anti-colonialism, but by the dictates of military strategy, and by British intransigence on the colonial issue. The United States, concentrating its forces against Japan, accepted British military primacy in Southeast Asia, and divided Indochina at 16th parallel between the British and the Chinese for the purposes of occupation. U.S. commanders serving with the British and Chinese, while instructed to avoid ostensible alignment with the French, were permitted to conduct operations in Indochina which did not detract from the campaign against Japan. Consistent with F.D.R.'s guidance, the U.S. did provide modest aid to French--and Viet Minh--resistance forces in Vietnam after March, 1945, but refused to provide shipping to move Free French troops there. Pressed by both the British and the French for clarification of U.S. intentions regarding the political status of Indochina, F.D.R. maintained that "it is a matter for postwar."

The President's trusteeship concept foundered as early as March 1943, when the U.S. discovered that the British, concerned over possible prejudice to Commonwealth policy, proved to be unwilling to join in any declaration on trusteeships, and indeed any statement endorsing national independence which went beyond the Atlantic Charter's vague "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." So sensitive were the British on this point that the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944, at which the blueprint for the postwar international system was negotiated, skirted the colonial issue, and avoided trusteeships altogether. At each key decisional point at which the President could have influenced the course of events toward trusteeship -- in relations with the U.K., in casting the United Nations Charter, in instructions to allied commanders -- he declined to do so; hence, despite his lip service to trusteeship and anti-colonialism, F.D.R. in fact assigned to Indochina a status correlative to Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia: free territory to be reconquered and returned to its former owners. Non-intervention by the U.S. on behalf of the Vietnamese was tantamount to acceptance of the French return. On April 3, 1945, with President Roosevelt's approval, Secretary of State Stettinius issued a statement that, as a result of the Yalta talks, the U.S. would look to trusteeship as a postwar arrangement only for "territories taken from the enemy," and for "territories as might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." By context, and by the Secretary of State's subsequent interpretation, Indochina fell into the latter category. Trusteeship status for Indochina became, then, a matter for French determination.



Shortly following President Truman's entry into office, the U.S. assured France that it had never questioned, "even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China." The U.S. policy was to press France for progressive measures in Indochina, but to expect France to decide when its peoples would be ready for independence; "such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government." These guidelines, established by June, 1945 -- before the end of the war -- remained fundamental to U.S. policy.

With British cooperation, French military forces were reestablished in South Vietnam in September, 1945. The U.S. expressed dismay at the outbreak of guerrilla warfare which followed, and pointed out that while it had no intention of opposing the reestablishment of French control, "it is not the policy of this government to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force, and the willingness of the U.S. to see French control reestablished assumes that the French claim to have the support of the population in Indochina is borne out by future events." Through the fall and winter of 1945-1946, the U.S. received a series of requests from Ho Chi Minh for intervention in Vietnam; these were, on the record, unanswered. However, the U.S. steadfastly refused to assist the French military effort, e.g., forbidding American flag vessels to carry troops or war materiel to Vietnam. On March 6, 1946, the French and Ho signed an Accord in which Ho acceded to French re-entry into North Vietnam in return for recognition of the DRV as a "Free State," part of the French Union. As of April 1946, allied occupation of Indochina was officially terminated, and the U.S. acknowledged to France that all of Indochina had reverted to French control. Thereafter, the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam were dealt with in the context of the U.S. relationship with France. (Tab 1)

In late 1946, the Franco-Viet Minh War began in earnest. A chart (pp.A37 ff) summarizes the principal events in the relations between France and Vietnam, 1946-1949, describing the milestones along the route by which France, on the one hand, failed to reach any lasting accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and, on the other hand, erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead. The U.S. during these years continued to regard the conflict as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. The U.S. in its representations to France deplored the prospect of protracted war, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the U.S., deterred by the history of Ho's communist affiliation, always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Minh. Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Moreover,



in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe, and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. The U.S. considered the fate of Vietnamese nationalism relatively insignificant compared with European economic recovery and collective security from communist domination.

It is not as though the U.S. was not prepared to act in circumstances such as these. For example, in the 1945-1946 dispute over Dutch possessions in Indonesia, the U.S. actively intervened against its Dutch ally. In this case, however, the intervention was in concert with the U.K. (which steadfastly refused similar action in Indochina) and against the Netherlands, a much less significant ally in Europe than France. In wider company and at projected lower cost, the U.S. could and did show a determination to act against colonialism.

The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. Moreover, at the time, Indochina appeared to many to be one region in the troubled postwar world in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

In February, 1947, early in the war, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France in recovering its economic, political and military strength:

"In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area. Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin....

"Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to some sort of settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution."

The U.S. anxiously followed the vacillations of France's policy toward Bao Dai, exhorting the French to translate the successive "agreements" they contracted with him into an effective nationalist alternative to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. Increasingly, the U.S. sensed that French unwillingness to concede political power to Vietnamese heightened the possibility of the Franco-Viet Minh conflict being transformed into a struggle with Soviet imperialism. U.S. diplomats were instructed to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result [of France's] unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." France was notified that the U.S. was willing to extend financial aid to a Vietnamese government not a French puppet, "but could not give consideration of altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress [is] made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country."

As of 1948, however, the U.S. remained uncertain that Ho and the Viet Minh were in league with the Kremlin. A State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh in July 1948, indicated that:

"1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper Humanite since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called "leading communist" by recent Russian publications as well as Daily Worker makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

"2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able evaluate amount pressure or guidance Moscow exerting. We have impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages



which favorable to growth communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts."

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

"Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

"To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam....

"Evaluation. If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly so far. Possible explanations are:

1. No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.
2. The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightest elements that must be purged.
3. The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow.
4. A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

"Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely."

(Tab 2).

The collapse of the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949 sharpened American apprehensions over communist expansion in the Far East, and hastened U.S. measures to counter the threat posed by Mao's China.



The U.S. sought to create and employ policy instruments similar to those it was bringing into play against the Soviets in Europe: collective security organizations, economic aid, and military assistance. For example, Congress, in the opening paragraphs of the law it passed in 1949 to establish the first comprehensive military assistance program, expressed itself "as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties, and to protect their security and independence...." But, the negotiating of such an organization among the disparate powers and political entities of the Far East was inherently more complex a matter than the North Atlantic Treaty nations had successfully faced. The U.S. decided that the impetus for collective security in Asia should come from the Asians, but by late 1949, it also recognized that action was necessary in Indochina. Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming; by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible; but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

January and February, 1950, were pivotal months. The French took the first concrete steps toward transferring public administration to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh denied the legitimacy of the latter, proclaiming the DRV as the "only legal government of the Vietnam people," and was formally recognized by Peking and Moscow. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

"The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

"Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, we have every reason to believe that those legal governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

"French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal

governments by the countries of the world whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas...."

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950; on the same date, President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai. French requests for aid in Indochina followed within a few weeks. On May 8, 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

"The United States Government convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development."

The U.S. thereafter was deeply involved in the developing war. But it cannot be said that the extension of aid was a volte-face of U.S. policy precipitated solely by the events of 1950. It appears rather as the denouement of a cohesive progression of U.S. policy decisions stemming from the 1945 determination that France should decide the political future of Vietnamese nationalism. Neither the modest U.S. aid to the Viet Minh in 1945, nor the U.S. refusal to abet French recourse to arms the same year, signaled U.S. backing of Ho Chi Minh. To the contrary, the U.S. was wary of Ho, apprehensive lest Paris' imperialism be succeeded by control from Moscow. Uncertainty characterized the U.S. attitude toward Ho through 1948, but the U.S. incessantly pressured France to accommodate "genuine" Vietnamese nationalism and independence. In early 1950, both the apparent fruition of the Bao Dai solution, and the patent alignment of the DRV with the USSR and Communist China, impelled the U.S. to more direct intervention in Vietnam. (Tab 3)

I.A.

#### DISCUSSION

Tab 1 - Indochina in U.S. Wartime Policy, 1941-1950

2 - U.S. Neutrality in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1946-1949

3 - Origins of the U.S. Involvement in Vietnam



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1. Indochina in U.S. Wartime Policy, 1941-1945

In the interval between the fall of France in 1940, and the Pearl Harbor attack in December, 1941, the United States watched with increasing apprehension the flux of Japanese military power into Indochina. At first the United States urged Vichy to refuse Japanese requests for authorization to use bases there, but was unable to offer more than vague assurances of assistance, such as a State Department statement to the French Ambassador on 6 August 1940 that:

"We have been doing and are doing everything possible within the framework of our established policies to keep the situation in the Far East stabilized; that we have been progressively taking various steps, the effect of which has been to exert economic pressure on Japan; that our Fleet is now based on Hawaii, and that the course which we have been following, as indicated above, gives a clear indication of our intentions and activities for the future." \*

The French Ambassador replied that:

"In his opinion the phrase 'within the framework of our established policies,' when associated with the apparent reluctance of the American Government to consider the use of military force in the Far East at this particular time, to mean that the United States would not use military or naval force in support of any position which might be taken to resist the Japanese attempted aggression on Indochina. The Ambassador [feared] that the French Government would, under the indicated pressure of the Japanese Government, be forced to accede..." \*

The fears of the French Ambassador were realized. In 1941, however, Japan went beyond the use of bases to demands for a presence in Indochina tantamount to occupation. President Roosevelt himself expressed the heightening U.S. alarm to the Japanese Ambassador, in a conversation recorded by Acting Secretary of State Welles as follows:

"The President then went on to say that this new move by Japan in Indochina created an exceedingly serious problem for the United States...the cost of any military occupation is tremendous and the occupation itself is not conducive to the

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\* U.S. Department of State Memorandum from J. C. Dunn to Under Secretary of State Welles, 6 August 1940.

production by civilians in occupied countries of food supplies and raw materials of the character required by Japan. Had Japan undertaken to obtain the supplies she required from Indochina in a peaceful way, she not only would have obtained larger quantities of such supplies, but would have obtained them with complete security and without the draining expense of a military occupation. Furthermore, from the military standpoint, the President said, surely the Japanese Government could not have in reality the slightest belief that China, Great Britain, the Netherlands or the United States had any territorial designs on Indochina nor were in the slightest degree providing any real threats of aggression against Japan. This Government, consequently, could only assume that the occupation of Indochina was being undertaken by Japan for the purpose of further offense and this created a situation which necessarily must give the United States the most serious disquiet...

"...The President stated that if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indochina with its military and naval forces, or, had such steps actually been commenced, if the Japanese Government would withdraw such forces, the President could assure the Japanese Government that he would do everything within his power to obtain from the Governments of China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States itself a binding and solemn declaration, provided Japan would undertake the same commitment, to regard Indochina as a neutralized country in the same way in which Switzerland had up to now been regarded by the powers as a neutralized country. He stated that this would imply that none of the powers concerned would undertake any military act of aggression against Indochina and would remain in control of the territory and would not be confronted with attempts to dislodge them on the part of de Gaullist or Free French agents or forces." \*

The same date, Secretary of State Cordell Hull instructed Sumner Welles to see the Japanese Ambassador, and

"Make clear the fact that the occupation of Indochina by Japan possibly means one further important step to seizing control of the South Sea area, including trade routes of supreme importance to the United States controlling such products as rubber, tin and other commodities. This was of vital concern to the United States. The Secretary said that if we did not bring out this point our people will not understand the significance of this movement into Indochina. The Secretary mentioned another point to be stressed: there is no theory on which Indochina could be flooded with armed forces, aircraft, et cetera,

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\* Memorandum of Conversation by Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, 24 July, 1941; the President's proposal for neutralization was submitted to Japan in a note of 8 August, 1941.



for the defense of Japan. The only alternative is that this venture into Indochina has a close relation to the South Sea area and its value for offense against that area." \*

In a press statement of 2 August 1941, Acting Secretary of State Welles deplored Japan's "expansionist aims" and impuned Vichy:

"Under these circumstances, this Government is impelled to question whether the French Government at Vichy in fact proposes to maintain its declared policy to preserve for the French people the territories both at home and abroad which have long been under French sovereignty.

"This Government, mindful of its traditional friendship for France, has deeply sympathized with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories and to preserve them intact. In its relations with the French Government at Vichy and with the local French authorities in French territories, the United States will be governed by the manifest effectiveness with which those authorities endeavor to protect these territories from domination and control by those powers which are seeking to extend their rule by force and conquest, or by the threat thereof."

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, as part of the U.S. attempt to obtain Japanese consent to a non-aggression pact, the U.S. again proposed neutralization of Indochina in return for Japanese withdrawal. The events of 7 December 1941 put the question of the future of Indochina in the wholly different context of U.S. strategy for fighting World War II.

a. Roosevelt's Trusteeship Concept

U.S. policy toward Indochina during World War II was ambivalent. On the one hand, the U.S. appeared to support Free French claims to all of France's overseas dominions. The U.S. early in the war repeatedly expressed or implied to the French an intention to restore to France its

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\* Memorandum by Cecil W. Gray, Assistant to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1942.



overseas empire after the war. These U.S. commitments included the August 2, 1941, official statement on the Franco-Japanese agreement; a December, 1941, Presidential letter to Pétain; a March 2, 1942, statement on New Caledonia; a note to the French Ambassador of April 13, 1942; Presidential statements and messages at the time of the North Africa invasion; the Clark-Darlan Agreement of November 22, 1942; and a letter of the same month from the President's Personal Representative to General Henri Giraud, which included the following reassurance:

"...The restoration of France to full independence, in all the greatness and vastness which it possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United Nations. It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939." 1/

On the other hand, in the Atlantic Charter and other pronouncements the U.S. proclaimed support for national self-determination and independence. Moreover, the President of the United States, especially distressed at the Vichy "sell-out" to Japan in Indochina, often cited French rule there as a flagrant example of onerous and exploitative colonialism, and talked of his determination to turn Indochina over to an international trusteeship after the war. In early 1944, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, called on Secretary of State Hull to inquire whether the President's "rather definite" statements "that Indo-china should be taken away from the French and put under an international trusteeship" -- made to "Turks, Egyptians and perhaps others" during his trip to Cairo and Teheran -- represented "final conclusions in view of the fact that they would soon get back to the French..." 2/ (The French marked well the President's views -- in fact as France withdrew from Vietnam in 1956, its Foreign Minister recalled Roosevelt's assuring the Sultan of Morocco that his sympathies lay with colonial peoples struggling for independence. 3/) Lord Halifax later recorded that:

"The President was one of the people who used conversation as others of us use a first draft on paper...a method of trying out an idea. If it does not go well, you can modify it or drop it as you will. Nobody thinks anything of it if you do this with a paper draft; but if you do it with conversation, people say that you have changed your mind, that 'you never knew where you have him,' and so on." 4/

But in response to a memorandum from Secretary of State Hull putting the question of Indochina to F.D.R., and reminding the President of the numerous U.S. commitments to restoration of the French empire, Roosevelt replied (on January 24, 1944) that:

"I saw Halifax last week and told him quite frankly that it was perfectly true that I had, for over a year, expressed the opinion that Indo-China should not go back to France but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country -- thirty million inhabitants for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning.

"As a matter of interest, I am wholeheartedly supported in this view by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and by Marshal Stalin. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign Office in this matter. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. They have never liked the idea of trusteeship because it is, in some instances, aimed at future independence. This is true in the case of Indo-China.

"Each case must, of course, stand on its own feet, but the case of Indo-China is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that." 5/

#### (1) Military Strategy Pre-eminent

Throughout the year 1944, the President held to his views, and consistent with them, proscribed U.S. aid to resistance groups -- including French groups -- in Indochina. But the war in the Asian theaters moved rapidly, and the center of gravity of the American effort began to shift northward toward Japan. The question of U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia then came to the fore. At the Second Quebec Conference (September, 1944), the U.S. refused British offers of naval assistance against Japan because Admiral King believed "the best occupation for any available British forces would be to re-take Singapore, and to assist the Dutch in recovering the East Indies," and because he suspected that the offer "was perhaps not unconnected with a desire for United States help in clearing the Japanese out of the Malay States and Netherlands East Indies." 6/ Admiral King's suspicions were not



well-founded, at least insofar as Churchill's strategic thought was concerned. The Prime Minister was evidently as unwilling to invite an active American role in the liberation of Southeast Asia as the U.S. was to undertake same; as early as February, 1944, Churchill wrote that:

"A decision to act as a subsidiary force under the Americans in the Pacific raises difficult political questions about the future of our Malayan possessions. If the Japanese should withdraw from them or make peace as the result of the main American thrust, the United States Government would after the victory feel greatly strengthened in its view that all possessions in the East Indian Archipelago should be placed under some international body upon which the United States would exercise a decisive concern." 7/

The future of Commonwealth territories in Southeast Asia stimulated intense British interest in American intentions for French colonies there. In November and December of 1944, the British expressed to the United States, both in London and in Washington, their concern "that the United States apparently has not yet determined upon its policy toward Indochina." 8/ The head of the Far Eastern Department in the British Foreign Office told the U.S. Ambassador that:

"It would be difficult to deny French participation in the liberation of Indochina in light of the increasing strength of the French Government in world affairs, and that, unless a policy to be followed toward Indochina is mutually agreed between our two governments, circumstances may arise at any moment which will place our two governments in a very awkward situation." 9/

President Roosevelt, however, refused to define his position further, notifying Secretary of State Stettinius on January 1, 1945:

"I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for postwar.--...I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese.--You can tell Halifax that I made this very clear to Mr. Churchill. From both the military and civil point of view, action at this time is premature." 10/

However, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff were concurrently planning the removal of American armed forces from Southeast Asia. In response to approaches from French and Dutch officials requesting aid in expelling Japan from their former colonial territories, the U.S. informed them that:

"All our available forces were committed to fighting the Japanese elsewhere in the Pacific, and Indochina and the East Indies were therefore not included within the sphere of interest of the American Chiefs of Staff." 11/

When the Combined Chiefs of Staff met at Malta at the end of January, 1945,



American willingness to forego further operations in Southeast Asia led to a directive to Admiral Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander in that theatre, to liberate Malaya without U.S. assistance. 12/ After the Yalta Conference (February, 1945), U.S. commanders in the Pacific were informed that the U.S. planned to turn over to the British responsibility for operations in the Netherlands East Indies and New Guinea. The President, however, agreed to permit such U.S. military operations in Indochina as avoided "alignments with the French," and detraction from the U.S. military campaign against Japan. 13/ The latter structure precluded, in the U.S. view, the U.S. cooperation with the French at Mountbatten's headquarters, or the furnishing of ships to carry Free French forces to Indochina to undertake its liberation. This U.S. position came under particularly severe French criticism after 11 March 1945, when the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Vietnam, and prompted the Emperor Bao Dai to declare Vietnam unified and independent of France under Japanese protection. On 16 March 1945, a protest from General de Gaulle led to the following exchange between the Secretary of State and the President: 14/

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Washington

March 16, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Indo-China.

Communications have been received from the Provisional Government of the French Republic asking for:

- (1) Assistance for the resistance groups now fighting the Japanese in Indo-China.
- (2) Conclusion of a civil affairs agreement covering possible future operations in Indo-China.

These memoranda have been referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to obtain their views concerning the military aspects of the problems, and I shall communicate with you further on the subject upon receipt of the Joint Chiefs' reply.

Attached herewith is the text of a recent telegram from Ambassador Caffery describing his conversation with General de Gaulle on the subject of Indo-China. From this telegram and de Gaulle's speech of March 14, it appears that this Government may be made to appear responsible for the weakness of the

resistance to Japan in Indo-China. The British may likewise be expected to encourage this view. It seems to me that without prejudicing in any way our position regarding the future of Indo-China we can combat this trend by making public our desire to render such assistance as may be warranted by the circumstances and by the plans to which we are already committed in the Pacific area. To this end I attach a draft of a suggested statement for publication, subject to your approval, by the State Department.

/s/ E. R. Stettinius, Jr.

Enclosures:

1. Proposed Statement.
2. Copy of telegram  
from Ambassador Caffery  
/not included here/

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/Enclosure 1/

PROPOSED STATEMENT

The action of the Japanese Government in tearing away the veil with which it for so long attempted to cloak its domination of Indo-China is a direct consequence of the ever-mounting pressure which our arms are applying to the Japanese Empire. It is a link in the chain of events which began so disastrously in the summer of 1941 with the Franco-Japanese agreement for the "common defense" of Indo-China. It is clear that this latest step in the Japanese program will in the long run prove to be of no avail.

The Provisional Government of the French Republic has requested armed assistance for those who are resisting the Japanese forces in Indo-China. In accordance with its constant desire to aid all those who are willing to take up arms against our common enemies, this Government will do all it can to be of assistance in the present situation, consistent with plans to which it is already committed and with the operations now taking place in the Pacific. It goes without saying that all this country's available resources are being devoted to the defeat of our enemies and they will continue to be employed in the manner best calculated to hasten their downfall.



[Response]

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Washington

March 17, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Secretary of State

By direction of the President, there is returned herewith Secretary of State Memorandum of 16 March, subject Indo-China, which includes a proposed statement on the Japanese action in Indo-China.

The President is of the opinion that it is inadvisable at the present time to issue the proposed statement.

/s/ William D. Leahy

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The French were also actively pressuring the President and his key advisors through military channels. Admiral Leahy reported that, following Yalta:

"The French representatives in Washington resumed their frequent calls to my office after our return from the Crimea. They labeled most of their requests 'urgent.' They wanted to participate in the combined intelligence group then studying German industrial and scientific secrets; to exchange information between the American command in China and the French forces in Indo-China; and to get agreement in principle to utilizing the French naval and military forces in the war against Japan (the latter would assist in returning Indo-China to French control and give France a right to participate in lend-lease assistance after the defeat of Germany.)

"Most of the time I could only tell them that I had no useful information as to when and where we might make use of French assistance in the Pacific.

"However, we did attempt to give a helping hand to the French resistance groups in Indo-China. Vice Admiral Fenard called me on March 18 to say that planes from our 14th Air



Force in China were loaded with relief supplies for the undergrounders but could not start without authority from Washington. I immediately contacted General Handy and told him of the President's agreement that American aid to the Indo-China resistance groups might be given provided it involved no interference with our operations against Japan." 15/

## (2) Failure of the Trusteeship Proposal

In the meantime, the President's concept of postwar trusteeship status for dependent territories as an intermediate step toward autonomy had undergone study by several interdepartmental and international groups, but had fared poorly. In deference to British sensibilities, the United States had originally sought only a declaration from the colonial powers setting forth their intention to liberate their dependencies and to provide tutelage in self-government for subject peoples. Such a declaration would have been consistent with the Atlantic Charter of 1941 in which the U.S. and the U.K. jointly agreed that, among the "common principles...on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world," it was their policy that:

"...they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them...." 16/

In November, 1942, Secretary Hull submitted to the President a proposed draft US-UK declaration entitled "The Atlantic Charter and National Independence," which the President approved. Before this draft could be broached to the British, however, they submitted a counter-proposal, a statement emphasizing the responsibility of "parent" powers for developing native self-government, and avoiding endorsement of trusteeships. Subsequent Anglo-American discussions in March 1943 addressed both drafts, but foundered on Foreign Secretary Eden's opposition. Secretary Hull reported in his memoirs that Eden could not believe that the word "independence" would be interpreted to the satisfaction of all governments:

"...the Foreign Secretary said that, to be perfectly frank, he had to say that he did not like our draft very much. He said it was the word 'independence' that troubled him, he had to think of the British Empire system, which was built on the basis of Dominion and colonial status.

"He pointed out that under the British Empire system there were varying degrees of self-government, running from the Dominions through the colonial establishments which had in some cases, like Malta, completely self-government, to backward areas that were never likely to have their own government. He

added that Australia and New Zealand also had colonial possessions that they would be unwilling to remove from their supervisory jurisdiction." 17/

U.S. inability to work out a common policy with the U.K. also precluded meaningful discussion, let alone agreement, on the colonial issue at the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations in 1944. 18/ Through March, 1945, the issue was further occluded by debates within the U.S. Government over the postwar status of Pacific islands captured from the Japanese; in general, the War and Navy Departments advocated their retention under U.S. control as military bases, while State and other departments advocated an international trusteeship.

### (3) Decision on Indochina Left to France

Secretary of State Stettinius, with the approval of President Roosevelt, issued a statement on April 3, 1945, declaring that, as a result of international discussions at Yalta on the concept of trusteeship, the United States felt that the postwar trusteeship structure:

"...should be designed to permit the placing under it of the territories mandated after the last war, and such territories taken from the enemy in this war as might be agreed upon at a later date, and also such other territories as might be voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." 19/

Indochina thus seemed relegated to French volition.

Nonetheless, as of President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, U.S. policy toward the colonial possessions of its allies, and toward Indochina in particular, was in disarray:

-- The British remained apprehensive that there might be a continued U.S. search for a trusteeship formula which might impinge on the Commonwealth.

-- The French were restive over continued U.S. refusal to provide strategic transport for their forces, resentful over the paucity of U.S. support for French forces in Indochina, and deeply suspicious that the United States -- possibly in concert with the Chinese -- intended to block their regaining control of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

#### b. Truman and the Occupation of Indochina, 1945

Within a month of President Truman's entry into office, the French raised the subject of Indochina at the United Nations Conference at San Francisco. Secretary of State Stettinius reported the following conversation to Washington:

"...Indo-China came up in a recent conversation I had with Bidault and Bonnet. The latter remarked that although the French



Government interprets [Under Secretary of State] Welles' statement of 1942 concerning the restoration of French sovereignty over the French Empire as including Indo-China, the press continues to imply that a special status will be reserved for this colonial area. It was made quite clear to Bidault that the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China. Certain elements of American public opinion, however, condemned French governmental policies and practices in Indo-China. Bidault seemed relieved and has no doubt cabled Paris that he received renewed assurances of our recognition of French sovereignty over that area." 20/

In early June 1945, the Department of State instructed the United States Ambassador to China on the deliberations in progress within the U.S. Government and its discussions with allies on U.S. policy toward Indochina. He was informed that at San Francisco:

"...the American delegation has insisted upon the necessity of providing for a progressive measure of self-government for all dependent peoples looking toward their eventual independence or incorporation in some form of federation according to circumstances and the ability of the peoples to assume these responsibilities. Such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government. The latter seems unlikely. Nevertheless it is the President's intention at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intentions in regard to the establishment of civil liberties and increasing measures of self-government in Indochina before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect." 21/

The United Nations Charter (June 26, 1945) contained a "Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories":

#### Article 73

"Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present Charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and, to this end:

"a. to ensure, with due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses;

"b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement;..." 22/

Again, however, military considerations governed U.S. policy in Indochina. President Truman replied to General de Gaulle's repeated offers for aid in Indochina with statements to the effect that it was his policy to leave such matters to his military commanders. At the Potsdam Conference (July, 1945), the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that Indochina south of latitude 16° North was to be included in the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten. 23/ Based on this decision, instructions were issued that Japanese forces located north of that line would surrender to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and those to the south to Admiral Lord Mountbatten; pursuant to these instructions, Chinese forces entered Tonkin in September, 1945, while a small British task force landed at Saigon. Political difficulties materialized almost immediately, for while the Chinese were prepared to accept the Vietnamese government they found in power in Hanoi, the British refused to do likewise in Saigon, and deferred to the French there from the outset.

There is no evidence that serious concern developed in Washington at the swiftly unfolding events in Indochina. In mid-August, Vietnamese resistance forces of the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh, had seized power in Hanoi and shortly thereafter demanded and received the abdication of the Japanese puppet, Emperor Bao Dai. On V-J Day, September 2nd, Ho Chi Minh, had proclaimed in Hanoi the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The DRV ruled as the only civil government in all of Vietnam for a period of about 20 days. On 23 September 1945, with the knowledge of the British Commander in Saigon, French forces overthrew the local DRV government, and declared French authority restored in Cochinchina. Guerrilla war began around Saigon. Although American OSS representatives were present in both Hanoi and Saigon and ostensibly supported the Viet Minh, the United States took no official position regarding either the DRV, or the French and British actions in South Vietnam. 24/ In October, 1945, the United States stated its policy in the following terms:

"US has no thought of opposing the reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by US GOVT has questioned even by implication French sovereignty



over Indochina. However, it is not the policy of this GOVT to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force and the willingness of the US to see French control reestablished assumes that French claim to have the support of the population of Indochina is borne out by future events." 25/

French statements to the U.S. looked for an early end to the hostilities, and spoke reassuringly of reforms and liberality. In November, Jean Chauvel, Secretary-General to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, told the U.S. Ambassador that:

"When the trouble with the Annamites broke out de Gaulle had been urged by the French Mission in India to make some sort of policy statement announcing France's intention to adopt a far-reaching progressive policy designed to give the native population much greater authority, responsibility and representation in govt. De Gaulle considered the idea but rejected it because in the state of disorder prevailing in Indochina he believed that no such policy could be implemented pending restoration of French authority and would therefore just be considered by everyone as 'merely more fine words.' Furthermore de Gaulle and the Foreign Minister believe that the present situation is still so confused and they have so little information really reliable on the overall Indochina picture that such plans and thoughts as they held heretofore may have to be very thoroughly revised in the light of recent developments.

"Despite the fact that the French do not feel that they can as yet make any general statements outlining specific future plans for Indochina, Chauvel says that they hope 'very soon' to put into operation in certain areas programs including local elections which will be designed to grant much greater authority and greater voice in affairs to the natives. This he said would be a much better indication of the sincerity of French intentions than any policy statement....The French hope soon to negotiate an agreement with [the King of Cambodia] which will result in the granting of much greater responsibility and authority to the Cambodians. He mentioned specifically that there would be many more natives integrated into the local administrative services and it was also hoped that local elections could soon be held. The French he said intend to follow the same procedure in Laos when the situation permits and eventually also in Annam and Tonkin. When order is restored throughout Indochina and agreements have been reached with the individual states Chauvel said the French intend to embody the results of these separate agreements into a general program for all of Indochina." 26/



From the autumn of 1945 through the autumn of 1946, the United States received a series of communications from Ho Chi Minh depicting calamitous conditions in Vietnam, invoking the principles proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter and in the Charter of the United Nations, and pleading for U.S. recognition of the independence of the DRV, or -- as a last resort -- trusteeship for Vietnam under the United Nations. But while the U.S. took no action on Ho's requests, it was also unwilling to aid the French. On January 15, 1946, the Secretary of War was advised by the Department of State that it was contrary to U.S. policy to "employ American flag vessels or aircraft to transport troops of any nationality to or from the Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina, nor to permit use of such craft to carry arms, ammunition or military equipment to these areas." 27/ However, the British arranged for the transport of additional French troops to Indochina, bilaterally agreed with the French for the latter to assume British occupation responsibilities, and signed a pact on 9 October, 1945, giving "full recognition to French rights" in Indochina. 28/ French troops began arriving in Saigon that month, and subsequently the British turned over to them some 800 U.S. Lend-Lease jeeps and trucks. President Truman approved the latter transaction on the grounds that removing the equipment would be impracticable. 29/

The fighting between the French and the Vietnamese which began in South Vietnam with the 23 September, 1945, French coup d'etat, spread from Saigon throughout Cochinchina, and to southern Annam. By the end of January, 1946, it was wholly a French affair, for by that time the British withdrawal was complete; on 4 March, 1946, Admiral Lord Mountbatten deactivated Indochina as territory under the Allied Southeast Asia Command, thereby transferring all control to French authorities. 30/ From French headquarters, via Radio Saigon, came announcements that a military "mopping-up" campaign was in progress, but pacification was virtually complete; but these reports of success were typically interspersed with such items as the following:

"20 March 1946:

"Rebel bands are still (wreaking destruction) in the areas south of Saigon. These bands are quite large, some numbering as many as 1,000 men. Concentrations of these bands are to be found...in the villages. Some have turned north in an attempt to disrupt (communications) in the Camau Peninsula, northeast of Batri and in the general area south of (Nha Trang). In the area south of Cholon and in the north of the Plaine des Joncs region, several bands have taken refuge...."

"21 March 1946:

"The following communique was issued by the High Commissioner for Indochina this morning: 'Rebel activities have increased in



the Bien Hoa area, on both banks of the river Dong Nai. A French convoy has been attacked on the road between Bien Hoa and Tan Uyen where a land mine had been laid by the rebels.

'In the (Baclo) area, northwest of Saigon, a number of pirates have been captured in the course of a clean-up raid. Among the captured men are five Japanese deserters. The dead bodies of three Japanese, including an officer, have been found at the point where the operation was carried out.

'A French detachment was ambushed at (San Jay), south Annam. The detachment, nevertheless, succeeded in carrying out its mission. Several aggressions by rebel parties are reported along the coastal road.'" 31/

Violence abated in South Vietnam somewhat as Franco-DRV negotiations proceeded in spring, 1946, but in the meantime, French forces moved into further confrontation with Vietnamese "rebels" in Tonkin. In February, 1946, a French task force prepared to force landings at Haiphong, but was forestalled by diplomatic maneuver. A Franco-Chinese agreement of 28 February 1946 provided that the Chinese would turn over their responsibilities in northern Indochina to the French on 31 March 1946. 32/

On March 6, 1946, a French-DRV accord was reached in the following terms: 33/

"1. The French Government recognizes the Vietnamese Republic as a Free State having its own Government, its own Parliament, its own Army and its own Finances, forming part of the Indochinese Federation and of the French Union. In that which concerns the reuniting of the three "Annamite Regions" [Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin] the French Government pledges itself to ratify the decisions taken by the populations consulted by referendum.

"2. The Vietnamese Government declares itself ready to welcome amicably the French Army when, conforming to international agreements, it relieves the Chinese Troops. A Supplementary Accord, attached to the present Preliminary Agreement, will establish the means by which the relief operations will be carried out.

"3. The stipulations formulated above will immediately enter into force. Immediately after the exchange of signatures, each of the High Contracting Parties will take all measures necessary to stop hostilities in the field, to maintain the troops in their respective positions, and to create the favorable atmosphere necessary to the immediate opening of friendly

and sincere negotiations. These negotiations will deal particularly with:

- a. diplomatic relations of Viet-nam with Foreign States
- b. the future law of Indochina
- c. French interests, economic and cultural, in Viet-nam.

Hanoi, Saigon or Paris may be chosen as the seat of the conference.

DONE AT HANOI, the 6th of March 1946

Signed: Ho-chi Minh  
and Vu Hong Khanh

Signed: Sainteny

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French forces quickly exercised their prerogative, occupying Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and negotiations opened in Dalat in April. 34/

Hence, as of April 10, 1946, allied occupation in Indochina was officially over, and French forces were positioned in all of Vietnam's major cities; the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam then shifted from the context of wartime strategy to the arena of the U.S. relationship with France. 35/



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## 2. U.S. Neutrality in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1946-1949

### a. Failures of Negotiated Settlement

The return of the French to Tonkin in March, 1946, created an explosive situation. North Vietnam, a traditionally rice-deficient area, had experienced an extraordinarily bad harvest in 1945. Severe famine was scarcely helped by the concentration of armies in the Red River Delta -- Vietnamese irregular forces, the most numerous belonging to the Viet Minh; some 150,000 Chinese; and then the French Expeditionary Corps. The people were not only hungry, but politically restive; the popular appetite for national independence had been thoroughly whetted by the Viet Minh and the formation of the DRV. While feeling against all foreign occupiers ran high, the French remained the primary target of enmity. But the March 6 Accord deferred a reckoning, serving to mollify extremists in Tonkin, and to dampen guerrilla operations in South Vietnam. The accord in any event underwrote peaceful cooperation between France and the DRV in North Vietnam for eight months.

Yet the March 6 accord constituted an admission of defeat for Ho Chi Minh, because his policy had been directed toward internationalizing the Indochina problem. Ho made repeated overtures to the United States, to the United Nations, and to China, the USSR, and the U.K. 36/ His letters presented eloquent appeals for U.S. or U.N. intervention in Vietnam on the grounds of the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and on humanitarian grounds. The last such to be forwarded to the U.S. prior to the Accord of 6 March 1946, is summarized in the following telegram from an American diplomat in Hanoi, received in Washington 27 February 1946:

"Ho Chi Minh handed me 2 letters addressed to President of USA, China, Russia, and Britain identical copies of which were stated to have been forwarded to other governments named. In 2 letters to Ho Chi Minh request [sic] USA as one of United Nations to support idea of Annamese independence according to Philippines [sic] example, to examine the case of the Annamese,



and to take steps necessary to maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina. He asserts that Annamese will fight until United Nations interfere in support of Annamese independence. The petition addressed to major United Nations contains:

"A. Review of French relations with Japanese where French Indochina allegedly aided Japs:

"B. Statement of establishment on 2 September 1945 of PENW [sic] Democratic Republic of Viet Minh:

"C. Summary of French conquest of Cochin China begun 23 Sept 1945 and still incomplete:

"D. Outline of accomplishments of Annamese Government in Tonkin including popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities:

"E. Request to 4 powers: (1) To intervene and stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate fair settlement and (2) to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations organization. The petition ends with statement that Annamese ask for full independence in fact and that in interim while awaiting UNO decision the Annamese will continue to fight the reestablishment of French imperialism. Letters and petition will be transmitted to Department soonest." 37/

There is no record that the U.S. encouraged Ho Chi Minh thus to submit his cause to the U.S., beyond the O.S.S. support he received during and immediately after World War II; nor does the record reflect that the U.S. responded affirmatively to Ho's petitions. Rather, the U.S. Government appears to have adhered uniformly to a policy of looking to the French rather than to Vietnamese Nationalists for constructive steps toward Vietnamese independence. On 5 December, 1946, after the November incidents, but before the fighting broke out in earnest, State instructed the U.S. diplomatic representative in Hanoi as follows: 38/

"Assume you will see Ho in Hanoi and offer following summary our present thinking as guide.

"Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam. Report fully, repeating or requesting DEPT repeat Paris.

"Recent occurrences Tonkin cause deep concern. Consider March 6 accord and modus vivendi as result peaceful negotiation provide basis settlement outstanding questions between France and Vietnam and impose responsibility both sides not prejudice future, particularly forthcoming Fontainebleau Conference, by resort force. Unsettled situation such as pertains certain to offer provocations both sides, but for this reason conciliatory patient attitude especially necessary. Intransigence either side and disposition exploit incidents can only retard economic rehabilitation Indochina and cause indefinite postponement conditions cooperation France and Vietnam which both agree essential.

"If Ho takes stand non-implementation promise by French of Cochinchina referendum relieves Vietnam responsibility compliance with agreements, you might if you consider advisable raise question whether he believes referendum after such long disorder could produce worthwhile result and whether he considers compromise on status Cochinchina could possibly be reached through negotiation.

"May say American people have welcomed attainments Indochinese in efforts realize praiseworthy aspirations greater autonomy in framework democratic institutions and it would be regrettable should this interest and sympathy be imperilled by any tendency Vietnam administration force issues by intransigence and violence.

"May inform Ho [U.S. Ambassador Paris] discussing situation French similar frankness. For your INFO, [Foreign Office] in DEC 3 conversation stated (1) no question reconquest Indochina as such would be counter French public opinion and probably beyond French military resources, (2) French will continue base policy March 6 accord and modus vivendi and make every effort apply them through negotiation Vietnam, (3) French would resort forceful measures only on restricted scale in case flagrant violation agreements Vietnam, (4) d'Argenlieu's usefulness impaired by outspoken dislike Vietnam officials and



replacement perhaps desirable, (5) French Communists embarrassed in pose as guardian French international interests by barrage telegraphic appeals from Vietnam. [Ambassador] will express gratification this statement French policy with observation implementation such policy should go far obviate any danger that (1) Vietnamese irreconcilables and extremists might be in position make capital of situation (2) Vietnamese might be turned irrevocably against West and toward ideologies and affiliations hostile democracies which could result perpetual foment Indochina with consequences all Southeast Asia.

"Avoid impression US Govt making formal intervention this juncture. Publicity any kind would be unfortunate.

"Paris be guided foregoing.

"Acheson, Acting."

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For a while, the French seemed genuinely interested in pursuing a policy based on the March 6 Accord and the modus vivendi, and in avoiding a test of arms with the DRV. If there were contrary utterances from some, such as Admiral d'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner of Indo-China, -- who recorded his "amazement that France has such a fine expeditionary corps in Indochina and yet its leaders prefer to negotiate rather than to fight...." -- there were many such as General Leclerc, who had led French forces into Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and promptly called on Ho Chi Minh, announcing every intention of honoring the March 6 Accord. "At the present time," he said, "there is no question of imposing ourselves by force on masses who desire evolution and innovation." 39/ The French Socialist Party -- the dominant political party in France -- consistently advocated conciliation during 1946. In December, 1946, even after the armed incidents in November between French and DRV armed forces in North Vietnam, Leon Blum -- who had become Premier of France, at the head of an all-Socialist Cabinet -- wrote that France had no alternative save to grant the Vietnamese independence:

"There is one way and only one of preserving in Indochina the prestige of our civilization, our political and spiritual influence, and also those of our material interests which are legitimate: it is sincere agreement [with Viet Nam] on the basis of independence...." 40/

The Communists, the other major Leftist party in France, were also vocally conciliatory; but, expectant of controlling the government, if not alone at least as part of a coalition, they tended to be more careful than the Socialists of their ability to sway nationalist sentiment. In July of 1946, L'Humanité, the Communist newspaper, had emphasized that the Party

did not wish France to be reduced to "its own small metropolitan territory," but warned that such would be the consequence if the colonial peoples turned against France:

"Are we, after having lost Syria and Lebanon yesterday, to lose Indochina tomorrow, North Africa the day after?" 41/

In the National Assembly in September, 1946, a Communist deputy had declared that:

"The Communists are as much as the next person for the greatness of the country. But...they have never ceased to affirm that the French Union...can only be founded on the confident, fraternal, and above all, democratic collaboration of all the peoples and races who compose it...." 42/

However, Ho Chi Minh was unable to capitalize upon his connection with the French Left (Ho had been one of the founding members of the French Communist Party in the early 1920's) to turn the expressed convictions of either the Socialists or the Communists to the advantage of the DRV. The Communists were not prepared to press the case for the Vietnamese at the cost of votes in France. The Socialists in power paid only lip service to conciliation, and allowed the more militant colonialists, especially those in Vietnam, to set France's policy in Indochina; thus, Admiral d'Argenlieu, not General Leclerc, spoke for the French Government.

In mid-December, 1946, as soon as Blum took office, Ho sent him a telegram with proposals for easing tension in Vietnam, but the message did not reach Paris until December 26. 43/ By that time the flash-point had been passed. In Hanoi, on 19 December 1946, Vietnamese troops, after several days of mounting animosity punctuated with violence, cut off the city's water and electricity, and attacked French posts using small arms, mortar and artillery. The issue of who was the aggressor has never been resolved. The fighting flared across North Vietnam, and two days later, the guerrilla war in South Vietnam quickened pace. The French responded to the initial attacks with an occasional savagery which rendered increasingly remote restoration of status quo ante.

On 23 December 1946, Premier Leon Blum addressed the National Assembly on the Indochina crisis. His speech was characteristically principled, and characteristically ambiguous: he talked peace, but endorsed militant French officials in Vietnam. Although he declared that, "The old colonial system founded on conquest and maintained by constraint, which tended toward exploitation of conquered lands and peoples is finished today," he also stated that:

"We have been obliged to deal with violence. I declare that the men who are fighting out there, the French of Indochina,



the friendly populations, may count unreservedly on the vigilance and resolution of the government.

"It was our common task to try everything to spare the blood of our children -- and also the blood that is not ours, but which is blood all the same, that of a people whose right to political liberty we recognized ten months ago, and who should keep their place in the union of peoples federated around France....

"Before all, order must be reestablished, peaceful order which is necessarily the basis for the execution of contracts." 44/

Premier Blum was succeeded within a week of his speech by the first government of the Fourth Republic under Paul Ramadier. France sent three emissaries to Vietnam at this juncture: Admiral d'Argenlieu, General Leclerc, and the Socialist Minister of Overseas France, Marius Moutet. Admiral d'Argenlieu became the High Commissioner of Indochina, and accused the Vietnamese of breaking faith with France. He stated emphatically that France intended to preserve in Indochina:

"...the maintenance and development of its present influence and of its economic interests, the protection of ethnic minorities with which it is entrusted, the care of assuring the security of strategic bases within the framework of defense of the Federation and the French Union....

"France does not intend in the present state of evolution of the Indochinese people to give them unconditional and total independence, which would only be a fiction gravely prejudicial to the interests of the two parties." 45/

The other two representatives of France were dispatched on fact-finding missions. Their reports contained diametrically opposing policy recommendations. General Leclerc wrote:

"In 1947 France will no longer put down by force a grouping of 24,000,000 inhabitants which is assuming unity and in which there exists a xenophobic and perhaps a national ideal....

"The capital problem from now on is political. It is a question of coming to terms with an awakening xenophobic nationalism, channeling it in order to safeguard, at least in part, the rights of France." 46/

The General had been sent to examine the military situation, and returned recommending a political solution. The Socialist Marius Moutet had been sent to inquire into the political prospects, and returned with the conclusion that only a military solution was promising. Like

Admiral d'Argenlieu, Moutet believed that there could be no negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. He wrote of the "cruel disillusionment of agreements that could not be put into effect....," and he declared that:

"We can no longer speak of a free agreement between France and Vietnam....

"Before any negotiations today, it is necessary to have a military decision. I am sorry, but one cannot commit such madness as the Vietnamese have done with impunity." 47/

It was the politician's ideas, rather than the general's, which prevailed in Paris. Premier Ramadier -- himself a Socialist -- spoke of peace in Vietnam, and announced that his government favored independence and unity for Vietnam:

"Independence within the French Union and union of the three Annamese countries, if the Annamese people desire it." 48/

At the same time, however, his government permitted Admiral d'Argenlieu to launch a military campaign of major proportions and punitive intent.

Very early in the war, the French raised the spectre of Communist conspiracy in Vietnam. Admiral d'Argenlieu in Saigon called for an internationally concerted policy to array the Western powers against the expansion of communism in Asia, beginning with Vietnam. In the National Assembly debated in March, 1947, a Rightist deputy introduced the charge that the violence in Vietnam had been directed from Moscow:

"Nationalism in Indochina is a means, the end is Soviet imperialism." 49/

Neither the government nor the people of France heeded General Leclerc's statement of January, 1947:

"Anti-communism will be a useless tool as long as the problem of nationalism remains unsolved." 50/

Ho Chi Minh, for his part, issued repeated appeals to France for peace, even offering to withdraw personally:

"When France recognizes the independence and unity of Vietnam, we will retire to our village, for we are not ambitious for power or honor." 51/

In February, 1947, the French offered terms to Ho tantamount to unconditional surrender. Ho flatly rejected these, asking the French representative, "If you were in my place, would you accept them? ...In the French Union there is no place for cowards. If I accepted these conditions I should be one." 52/ On 1 March 1947, Ho appealed publicly to



the French government and the French people:

"Once again, we declare solemnly that the Vietnamese people desire only unity and independence in the French Union, and we pledge ourselves to respect French economic and cultural interests....If France would but say the word to cease hostility immediately, so many lives and so much property would be saved and friendship and confidence would be regained." 53/

But the French displayed little interest in negotiations. Premier Ramadier stated in March, 1947, that:

"We must protect the life and possessions of Frenchmen, of foreigners, of our Indochinese friends who have confidence in French liberty. It is necessary that we disengage our garrisons, re-establish essential communications, assure the safety of populations which have taken refuge with us. That we have done." 54/

Ramadier and his ministers spoke repeatedly in the spring of 1947 of an imminent end to the "military phase" of the crisis, and of the beginning of a "constructive phase," in which presumably economic and political assistance would supplant the military instrument; but in what was to become a pattern of expectation and frustration, the Fourth Republic discovered that its military forces were incapable of controlling even the principal lines of communication in Vietnam, and that the military solution severely taxed the full resources of the French Union. In March, 1947 an additional division of troops for the French Expeditionary Corps, dispatched to Vietnam per General Leclerc's recommendation, had to be diverted en route to quell an insurgency in Madagascar.

By the summer of 1947, the French Government was aware that the situation in Indochina was at an impasse. Having failed in its attempt to force a military decision, it turned to a political solution, as suggested by General Leclerc. But again the ideas of Admiral d'Argenlieu weighed heavily. In January, 1947, d'Argenlieu wrote that:

"If we examine the problem basically, we are led to inquire whether the political form unquestionably capable of benefiting from the political prestige of legitimacy is not the traditional monarchic institution, the very one that existed before the Japanese surrender....The return of the Emperor Bao Dai would probably reassure all those who, having opposed the Viet Minh, fear they will be accused of treason." 55/

It was with Bao Dai, not Ho Chi Minh, that the French elected to negotiate for a political settlement with Vietnamese Nationalists.

French emissaries approached Bao Dai with terms not unlike those Ho Chi Minh had negotiated on 6 March 1946: unity and independence within the French Union, provided Bao Dai formed a government which would furnish a clear alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV. With French encouragement, a group of Vietnamese Nationalists formed a political party advocating the installation of Bao Dai at the head of a non-Viet Minh Vietnamese regime. Bao Dai was at first evasive and skeptical, but was eventually convinced that the French situation in Indochina was sufficiently desperate that they would have to honor commitments they made to him. Bao Dai also seems to have believed that he could attract American support and material aid -- a view which may have stemmed in part from a 1947 Life magazine article by William C. Bullitt, the influential former U.S. Ambassador to France, endorsing Bao Dai as a solution to France's dilemma. 56/

France then proceeded to contract with Bao Dai a series of agreements, each of which ostensibly brought Bao Dai closer to genuine autonomy for Vietnam. It was not, however, until February, 1950, that the French National Assembly acceded to political independence and unification for Vietnam. Chronicled below are the principal steps by which France failed on the one hand to reach an accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and on the other hand erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead. 57/



PRINCIPAL EVENTS  
FRANCE - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1946 - 1950

<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Accord of 6 March 1946	Agreement signed by Ho Chi Minh with French provides that:  1. France recognizes DRV as: "Free State ... forming part of the Indochina Federation and the French Union."  2. DRV welcomes French Army into Tonkin for 5 years.  3. Further negotiations to spell out details for DRV independence.	1. Led to French occupation of Tonkin Delta.  2. No significant step taken by France toward DRV autonomy.
First Dalat Conference, 19 April - 11 May 1946	French and DRV delegates attempt to negotiate differences, but are able to enact only minor agreements on cultural and educational matters.	1. Overshadowed by continuing guerrilla war in Cochinchina.  2. A commission was set up to arrange an armistice; futile.
Establishment of Provisional Government of Cochinchina, 1 June 1946	French announce formation of an independent Cochinchina within the Indochina Federation and the French Union.	1. Touched off new wave of guerrilla war in South Vietnam.  2. Possibility of divided Vietnam pressured DRV in negotiations with France; stiffened DRV attitudes.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Fontainebleau Conference, 6 July - 10 September 1946	Formal negotiations in France between DRV delegation headed by Ho Chi Minh and second-rank French officials leads to no agreement on any substantive issue.	DRV delegation withdrew in protest over convening of Second Dalat Conference (below), resumed talks, then acceded to adjournment without progress.
Second Dalat Conference, 1 August 1946	Conference among French, Cochinchinese, Laotians, Cambodians, Montagnards of Annam:  1. Announces formation of "federal states" under French High Commissioner.  2. Denounces DRV delegation at Fontainebleau as unrepresentative.  3. Cambodians and Cochinchinese move for direct representation in French Union and abroad, but French refuse.	1. Caused breakdown of Fontainebleau Conference.  2. Erected new facade of federation, but led to no significant political concessions by French.
Franco-DRV <u>Modus Vivendi</u> , 14 September 1946	After DRV delegation departed from Fontainebleau, Ho Chi Minh signs agreement with France which provides, effective 30 October 1946:  1. Reciprocal rights for citizens.  2. Reciprocal property rights and restoration seized French property in Vietnam.  3. Piastre related to franc.  4. Customs union and free trade within Indochina Federation.  5. Armistice Commission to deal with guerrilla war in Cochinchina.	1. Led to some release of prisoners, and lull in guerrilla operations.  2. No substantial French political concessions eventuated.



<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
	6. Referendum to decide Cochinchina's relationship to DRV.	
	7. France-DRV talks to resume in January, 1947.	
"Incidents" at Haiphong, Langson, and Tourane, November, 1946	Local disputes lead to clashes between French and DRV troops.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. French seized unilateral control over Haiphong and Langson.</li> <li>2. French reinforcements landed at Tourane in violation of March 6 Accord.</li> </ol>
Hanoi Incident, 19 December 1946	Large-scale conflict begins, spreads throughout Vietnam.	Complete breakdown of relations between France and DRV
Declaration of the Freedom of Cochinchina, 4 February 1947	<p>French High Commissioner extends powers of the Saigon Government to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Legislative and executive action on all internal affairs.</li> <li>2. Universal suffrage for election of legislature.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. President Le Van Hoach of Cochinchina admitted Viet Minh controlled greater part of Cochinchina.</li> <li>2. Elections repeatedly postponed because of civil disorder.</li> </ol>
First Ha Long Bay Agreement, 7 December 1947	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bao Dai associates himself with French-sponsored nationalist movement.</li> <li>2. French promise in vague terms national independence for Vietnam.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. French took no action toward releasing their control in Vietnam.</li> <li>2. Bao Dai withdrew to Europe.</li> <li>3. Agreement condemned by non-Viet Minh nationalists, e.g., Ngo Dinh Diem.</li> </ol>

<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Second Ha Long Bay Agreement, 5 June 1948	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. France solemnly recognizes the independence of Vietnam within the French Union.</li> <li>2. Bao Dai reassociates himself with the attempt to form a nationalist government.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. France transferred no significant political power to Vietnamese.</li> <li>2. Led only to further negotiations between Bao Dai and France.</li> </ol>
Elysee Agreement, 8 March 1949	<p>In an exchange of letters between Bao Dai and President Auriol, France:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reconfirms Vietnam's status as an independent Associated State within the French Union.</li> <li>2. Agrees to unifying Vietnam, and placing it under Vietnamese administration, under terms to be negotiated subsequently.</li> <li>3. Retains control of Vietnamese armed forces and foreign relations.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. French economic and political primacy remained unchanged, even in principle.</li> <li>2. Cochinchina formally merged with Annam and Tonkin in State of Vietnam in June, 1949.</li> <li>3. Plans for internal administrative transfer announced 30 December 1949.</li> <li>4. Practical matters of transfer of administrative functions in principal external affairs were deferred to Pau Negotiations of 1950.</li> </ol>
Recognition of the Independence of the State of Vietnam, 14 June 1949	<p>French High Commissioner for Indochina and Emperor Bao Dai exchange letters in Saigon formalizing Elysee Agreement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cochinchina government tendered resignation to Bao Dai, merging in principle with new State of Vietnam.</li> <li>2. No actual transfer of political power occurred.</li> </ol>



<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
French Ratification of the Independence of Vietnam, 2 February 1950	Following National Assembly approval (29 January 1950), France announces ratification of the status for Vietnam described in the Elysee Agreement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. U.S. recognized State of Vietnam (3 February 1950).</li> <li>2. Details of transfer of powers awaited Pau Negotiations (March-November, 1950).</li> </ol>

b. U.S. Policy Toward the Conflict, 1947-1949

The U.S. manifested increasing concern over the conflict in Indochina, but through 1949 American policy continued to regard the war as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. It is clear on the record that American policy-makers of the day perceived the vacuity of French policies in 1946 and 1947. The U.S., in its representations to France, consistently deplored the prospect of protracted war in Vietnam, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the U.S. always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh, deterred by Ho's history of communist affiliation. Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Moreover, in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe, and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. Compared with European recovery, and escape from communist domination, the U.S. considered the fate of Vietnamese nationalism relatively insignificant. Further, the dispute in 1946 and 1945 over the Dutch possession in Indonesia had furnished a precedent: there the U.S. had moved cautiously, and only after long delays, to internationalize the conflict. Extensive American and British investments in Indonesia, moreover, afforded common ground for intervention. No similar rationale or commonality existed for intervention in Indochina, since Indochina was almost exclusively a French economic preserve, and a political morass which the U.K. was manifestly interested in avoiding.



The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. It was, moreover, a policy formulated with an undertone of indifference: at the time, Indochina appeared to be one region in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

When open warfare broke out between the DRV and France in December, 1946, John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, in a memorandum to Under Secretary Acheson of 23 December 1946, recommended that the latter call in the French Ambassador to highlight inherent dangers. The memorandum included this acute analysis:

"Although the French in Indochina have made far-reaching paper-concessions to the Vietnamese desire for autonomy, French actions on the scene have been directed toward whittling down the powers and the territorial extent of the Vietnam 'free state.' This process the Vietnamese have continued to resist. At the same time, the French themselves admit that they lack the military strength to reconquer the country. In brief, with inadequate forces, with public opinion sharply at odds, with a government rendered largely ineffective through internal division, the French have tried to accomplish in Indochina what a strong and united Britain has found it unwise to attempt in Burma. Given the present elements in the situation, guerrilla warfare may continue indefinitely."

Secretary Acheson acted on Mr. Vincent's suggestion, and expressed to the Ambassador views summarized as follows:

"We had anticipated such a situation developing in November and events have confirmed our fears. While we have no wish to

offer to mediate under present conditions we do want the French GOVT to know that we are ready and willing to do anything which it might consider helpful in the circumstances. We have been gratified to learn of Moutet's mission and have confidence in his moderation and broad viewpoint. We believe however that the situation is highly inflammatory and if present unsettled conditions continue, there is a possibility that other powers might attempt to bring the matter up before the Security Council. If this happens, as in the case of Indonesia, the question will arise whether the matter is one of purely French internal concern or a situation likely to disturb the peace. Other powers might likewise attempt some form of intervention as has been suggested in the Chinese press. We would be opposed to such steps, but from every point of view it seems important that the question be settled as soon as possible. Mr. Acheson added that he wondered whether the French would attempt to reconquer the country through military force which was a step that the British had found unwise to attempt in Burma." 58/

On 8 January, 1947, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris that the U.S. would approve sale of arms and armaments to France "except in cases which appear to relate to Indochina." 59/ On the same date, 8 January 1947, the French conveyed to the Department of State a message that:

"...the French Government appreciated the understanding attitude that Mr. Acheson had shown in discussing the problem of Indochina; that it had taken note of Mr. Acheson's offer of 'good offices' and appreciated the spirit in which the offer was made; and that the French Government did not feel that it could avail itself of our offer but must continue to handle the situation single-handedly along the lines stated by Moutet. [The emissary] went on to say that the principal objective of the French military was to restore order and reopen communications. He said that after this was done the French Government would be prepared to discuss matters with the Vietnamese. He said that the French Government had every intention of living up to the agreement of last March 6 and the modus vivendi of September 15, once order was restored. [He was] asked...whether he thought the French military could restore order within any foreseeable future time. He seemed to think, without much evidence of conviction, that they could." 60/

There then ensued an interesting exchange between the U.S. official and the French representative in which the Frenchman sketched a claim of American culpability for the war:



"Speaking personally, I told him that I thought there was one flaw in the French approach to the problem worth mentioning. I had in mind an apparent assumption by the French that there was an equality of responsibility as between the French and the Vietnamese. I said that this did not seem to me to be the case; that the responsibility of France as a world power to achieve a solution of the problem was far greater than that of the Vietnamese; and that the situation was not one which could be localized as a purely French-Vietnamese one but might affect adversely conditions throughout Southeast Asia.

"[The emissary] quickly substituted the word 'authority' for 'responsibility' and said that the French were now faced with the problem of reasserting their authority and that we must share the responsibility for their delay in doing so because we had not acceded to French requests in the autumn of 1945 for material assistance." 61/

Early in February, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France's recovering economic, political and military strength:

"In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina. they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut out eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area. Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin...."

"Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to some sort of

settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution." 62/

Thus, the U.S. chose to remain outside the conflict; the announced U.S. position was, in the words of Secretary of State George C. Marshall, to hope that "a pacific basis of adjustment of the difficulties could be found." 63/ Events conspired against this hope, however, and as the fighting continued, the prospect of a Moscow-controlled state in Vietnam continued to draw the U.S. nearer to involvement. On 13 May 1947, the Department of State furnished the following guidance to U.S. diplomats in Paris, Saigon, and Hanoi:

"Key our position is our awareness that in respect developments affecting position Western democratic powers in southern Asia, we essentially in same boat as French, also as British and Dutch. We cannot conceive setbacks to long-range interests France which would not also be setbacks our own. Conversely we should regard close association France and members French Union as not only to advantage peoples concerned, but indirectly our own.

"In our view, southern Asia in critical phase its history with seven new nations in process achieving or struggling independence or autonomy. These nations include quarter inhabitant's world and their future course, owing sheer weight populations, resources they command, and strategic location, will be momentous factor world stability. Following relaxation European controls, internal racial, religious, and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord, or already apparent anti-Western Pan-Asiatic tendencies could become dominant political force, or Communists could capture control. We consider as best safeguard against these eventualities a continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible their welfare. In particular we recognize Vietnamese will for indefinite period require French material and technical assistance and enlightened political guidance which can be provided only by nation steeped like France in democratic tradition and confirmed in respect human liberties and worth individual.

"We equally convinced, however, such association must be voluntary to be lasting and achieve results, and that protraction present situation Indochina can only destroy basic voluntary cooperation, leave legacy permanent bitterness, and irrevocably alienate Vietnamese from France and those values represented by France and other Western democracies.



"While fully appreciating difficulties French position this conflict, we feel there is danger in any arrangement which might provide Vietnamese opportunity compare unfavorably their own position and that of other peoples southern Asia who have made tremendous strides toward autonomy since war.

"While we are still ready and willing do anything we can which might be considered helpful, French will understand we not attempting come forward with any solution our own or intervene in situation. However, they will also understand we inescapably concerned with situation Far East generally, upon which developments Indochina likely have profound effect....

"For your INFO, evidence that French Communists are being directed accelerate their agitation French colonies even extent lose much popular support France (URTEL 1719 Apr 25) may be indication Kremlin prepared sacrifice temporary gains with 40 million French to long range colonial strategy with 600 million dependent people, which lends great urgency foregoing views....DEPT much concerned lest French efforts find QUOTE true representatives Vietnam UNQUOTE with whom negotiate result creation impotent puppet GOVT along lines Cochinchina regime, or that restoration Bao Dai [sic] may be attempted, implying democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism. You may refer these further views if nature your conversations French appears warrant." 64/

The U.S. position may have influenced the French to revise the first Ha Long Bay Agreement (December, 1947) and when the second agreement was signed in June, 1948, the U.S. promptly instructed the U.S. Ambassador to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result" of France's "unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." 65/ Again, however, the Ambassador was instructed to avoid ostensible intervention while making it clear that the U.S. foresaw France's losing Indochina if it persisted to ignore American advice. These instructions were repeated at the end of August, 1948, with the assertion that the Department of State "believes nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group." 66/

The first suggestions that the U.S. became tangibly involved in Vietnam appear in a reported conversation of the U.S. Ambassador with the French Foreign Office in September, 1948. The U.S. Ambassador again urged on France legislation or other definite action to move toward the unification of Vietnam, and the immediate negotiation of concrete steps toward autonomy as envisaged by the Ha Long Bay Agreement. He then told the French representative that:

"...US is fully appreciative difficulties which face French Government in Indochina at this time and reminds him that US had already indicated its willingness, if French Government so desired, to give public indication its approval of concrete steps by French Government to come to grips with basic political problem of Indochina. I informed him that US also willing under similar circumstances to consider assisting French Government with respect to matter of financial aid for Indochina through ECA but could not give consideration to altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country." 67/

As negotiations proceeded with Bao Dai preliminary to the Elysee Agreement, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris, on 17 January 1949, that:

"While the Department is desirous of the French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has a reasonable chance of winning over the preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrievably commit the U.S. to support of a native government which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually a puppet government separated from the people and existing only by the presence of French military forces." 68/

Following the Elysee Agreement, the U.S. was better disposed toward providing aid in Indochina. On 10 May 1949, the American Consul in Saigon was informed that the U.S. desired the "Bao Dai experiment" to succeed, since there appeared to be no other alternative.

"At the proper time and under the proper circumstances, the Department will be prepared to do its part by extending recognition to the Bao Dai government and by expressing the possibility of complying with any request by such a government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. It must be understood, however, that an aid program of this nature would require Congressional approval. Since the U.S. could, however, scarcely afford backing a government which would have the color and be likely to suffer the fate of a puppet regime, it must be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make the Bao Dai solution attractive to the nationalists. This is a step of which the French themselves must see the urgency and necessity in view of the possibly short time remaining before Communist successes in China are felt in Indochina. Moreover, the Bao Dai government must through its own efforts demonstrate the capacity to organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to insure the maximum opportunity for obtaining requisite popular support, inasmuch as a government created in Indochina analogous to the Kuomintang would be foredoomed to failure." 69/



But "anti-communism" initially proved to be no better guideline for the formulation of American policy in Indochina than it had been for the French. Indeed, early U.S. attempts to discern the nature and extent of communist influence in Vietnam devolved to the seeming paradox that if Ho Chi Minh were communist, he seemed to have no visible ties with Moscow. For example, a State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh provided to the U.S. Ambassador in China in July, 1948, was admittedly speculative:

"1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper Humanite since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called 'leading communist' by recent Russian publications as well as Daily Worker makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

"2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able evaluate amount pressure or guidance Moscow exerting. We have impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages which favorable to growth communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts." 70/

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

"Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

"To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam....

"Evaluation. If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly so far. Possible explanations are:

1. No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.
2. The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightist elements that must be purged.
3. The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow.
4. A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely."71/



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3. Origins of the U.S. Involvement in Vietnama. The Policy Context

Events in China of 1948 and 1949 brought the United States to a new awareness of the vigor of communism in Asia, and to a sense of urgency over its containment. U.S. policy instruments developed to meet unequivocal communist challenges in Europe were applied to the problem of the Far East. Concurrent with the development of NATO, a U.S. search began for collective security in Asia; economic and military assistance programs were inaugurated; and the Truman Doctrine acquired wholly new dimensions by extension into regions where the European empires were being dismantled. In March, 1947, President Truman had set forth the following policy guidelines:

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way...." 72/

The President went on to underscore the U.S. determination to commit its resources to contain communism. While he clearly subordinated military aid to economic and political means, he did assert the U.S. intent to assist in maintaining security:

"To insure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes." 73/

In the year 1947, while U.S. military assistance began to flow into Greece to ward off subversive aggression, the U.S. inaugurated the European Recovery Plan (ERP). ERP was aimed at economic recovery in Western Europe, especially in countries such as France and Italy where post-war depression was fostering marked leftward political trends. In one of the high level appraisals of the situation that the U.S. had to counter in 1947, the Harriman Committee on Foreign Aid has concluded that:

"The interest of the United States in Europe...cannot be measured simply in economic terms. It is also strategic and political. We all know that we are faced in the world today with two conflicting ideologies....Our position in the world has been based for at least a century on the existence in Europe of a number of strong states committed by tradition and inclination to the democratic concept...." 74/

The fall of the Czechoslovakian Government in February 1948 brought about the Brussels Pact, a Western European collective defense and economic collaboration arrangement. The blockade of Berlin, which began on 1 April 1948, accelerated U.S. movement toward membership in the alliance. On June 11, 1948 the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution advising the Executive to undertake the:

"...Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in accordance with the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Charter [of the UN], association of



the United States, by constitutional process, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security." 75/

That same month, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act, and in July, 1948, opened negotiations for a North Atlantic Alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in April, 1949, and entered into force in August of that year.

In the same omnibus foreign assistance legislation which had authorized ECA in June, 1948, Congress had provided for a China Aid Program. This measure met almost immediate failure, for Mao's armies spread unchecked over the China mainland, and by mid-1949 the position of the nationalists there was untenable. The "failure" of U.S. aid -- which was termed such by Congressional critics -- no less than the urgent situation in Europe and the exploding of the first Soviet nuclear device in September, 1949, figured in Congressional action on military assistance legislation. 76/

On October 6, 1949, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) through which U.S. arms, military equipment and training assistance might be provided world-wide for collective defense. In the first appropriations under MDAP, NATO countries received 76% of the total, and Greece and Turkey (not yet NATO members), 16%. 77/ But Korea and the Philippines received modest aid, and the legislators clearly intended the law to underwrite subsequent appropriations for collective security in Asia. The opening paragraph of the law not only supported NATO, but foreshadowed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty:

"An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the Defense and General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Military Assistance to Foreign Nations, Approved October 6, 1949.

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the 'Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949.'

#### "FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

"The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be

used except in the common interest. The Congress hereby finds that the efforts of the United States and other countries to promote peace and security in furtherance of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations require additional measures of support based upon the principle of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid. These measures include the furnishing of military assistance essential to enable the United States and other nations dedicated to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter to participate effectively in arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in support of those purposes and principles. In furnishing such military assistance, it remains the policy of the United States to continue to exert maximum efforts to obtain agreements to provide the United Nations with armed forces as contemplated in the Charter and agreements to achieve universal control of weapons of mass destruction and universal regulation and reduction of armaments, including armed forces, under adequate safeguards to protect complying nations against violation and evasion.

"The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence.

"The Congress recognizes that economic recovery is essential to international peace and security and must be given clear priority. The Congress also recognizes that the increased confidence of free peoples in their ability to resist direct or indirect aggression and to maintain internal security will advance such recovery and support political stability." 78/

While Congress was deliberating on MDAP, the staff of the National Security Council, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, had been reexamining U.S. policy toward Asia. In June, 1949, the Secretary had noted that he was:

"...increasingly concerned at the...advance of communism in large areas of the world and particularly the successes of communism in China...."

"A major objective of United States policy, as I understand it, is to contain communism in order to reduce its threat to our security. Our actions in Asia should be part of a carefully considered and comprehensive plan to further that objective." 79/



The NSC study responding to the Secretary's request is remarkable for the rarity of its specific references to Indochina. The staff study focused, rather, on generalities concerning the conflict between the interests of European metropolises and the aspirations of subject Asian peoples for independence. The following extract is from the section of the study dealing with Southeast Asia:

"The current conflict between colonialism and native independence is the most important political factor in south-east Asia. This conflict results not only from the decay of European imperial power in the area but also from a widening political consciousness and the rise of militant nationalism among the subject peoples. With the exception of Thailand and the Philippines, the southeast Asia countries do not possess leaders practiced in the exercise of responsible power. The question of whether a colonial country is fit to govern itself, however, is not always relevant in practical politics. The real issue would seem to be whether the colonial country is able and determined to make continued foreign rule an overall losing proposition for the metropolitan power. If it is, independence for the colonial country is the only practical solution, even though misgovernment eventuates. A solution of the consequent problem of instability, if it arises, must be sought on a non-imperialist plane. In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia. The United States should continue to use its influence looking toward resolving the colonial nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist-colonial conflict, lay the basis for political stability and resistance to communism, and avoid weakening the colonial powers who are our western allies. However, it must be remembered that the long colonial tradition in Asia has left the peoples of that area suspicious of Western influence. We must approach the problem from the Asiatic point of view in so far as possible and should refrain from taking the lead in movements which must of necessity be of Asian origin. It will therefore be to our interest wherever possible

to encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area....

"It would be to the interest of the United States to make use of the skills, knowledge and long experience of our European friends and, to whatever extent may be possible, enlist their cooperation in measures designed to check the spread of USSR influence in Asia. If members of the British Commonwealth, particularly India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, can be persuaded to join with the United Kingdom and the United States in carrying out constructive measures of economic, political and cultural cooperation, the results will certainly be in our interest. Not only will the United States be able thus to relieve itself of part of the burden, but the cooperation of the white nations of the Commonwealth will arrest any potential dangers of the growth of a white-colored polarization." 80/

On December 30, 1949, the National Security Council met with President Truman presiding, discussed the NSC staff study, and approved the following conclusions:

"As the basis for realization of its objectives, the United States should pursue a policy toward Asia containing the following components:

"a. The United States should make known its sympathy with the efforts of Asian leaders to form regional associations of non-Communist states of the various Asian areas, and if in due course associations eventuate, the United States should be prepared, if invited, to assist such associations to fulfill their purposes under conditions which would be to our interest. The following principles should guide our actions in this respect:

(1) Any association formed must be the result of a genuine desire on the part of the participating nations to cooperate for mutual benefit in solving the political, economic, social and cultural problems of the area.

(2) The United States must not take such an active part in the early stages of the formation of such an association that it will be subject to the charge of using the Asiatic nations to further United States ambitions.

(3) The association, if it is to be a constructive force, must operate on the basis of mutual aid and self-help in all fields so that a true partnership may exist based on equal rights and equal obligations.

(4) United States participation in any stage of the development of such an association should be with a view to accomplishing our basic objectives in Asia and to assuring that any



association formed will be in accord with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with regional arrangements.

"b. The United States should act to develop and strengthen the security of the area from Communist external aggression or internal subversion. These steps should take into account any benefits to the security of Asia which may flow from the development of one or more regional groupings. The United States on its own initiative should now:

(1) Improve the United States position with respect to Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines.

(2) Scrutinize closely the development of threats from Communist aggression, direct or indirect, and be prepared to help within our means to meet such threats by providing political, economic, and military assistance and advice where clearly needed to supplement the resistance of the other governments in and out of the area which are more directly concerned.

(3) Develop cooperative measures through multi-lateral or bilateral arrangements to combat Communist internal subversion.

(4) Appraise the desirability and the means of developing in Asia some form of collective security arrangements, bearing in mind the following considerations:

(a) The reluctance of India at this time to join in any anti-Communist security pact and the influence this will have among the other nations of Asia.

(b) The necessity of assuming that any collective security arrangements which might be developed be based on the principle of mutual aid and on a demonstrated desire and ability to share in the burden by all the participating states.

(c) The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangements would be consonant with the purposes of any regional association which may be formed in accordance with paragraph 3-a above.

(d) The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangement would be in conformity with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter relating to individual and collective self-defense.

"c. The United States should encourage the creation of an atmosphere favorable to economic recovery and development in non-Communist Asia, and to the revival of trade along multi-lateral, non-discriminatory lines. The economic policies of the

United States should be adapted to promote, where possible, economic conditions that will contribute to political stability in friendly countries of Asia, but the United States should carefully avoid assuming responsibility for the economic welfare and development of that continent...."

\* \* \*

"h. The United States should continue to use its influence in Asia toward resolving the colonial-nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movement while at the same time minimizing the strain on the colonial powers who are our Western allies. Particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese....

"i. Active consideration should be given to means by which all members of the British Commonwealth may be induced to play a more active role in collaboration with the United States in Asia. Similar collaboration should be obtained to the extent possible from other non-Communist nations having interests in Asia.

"j. Recognizing that the non-Communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against Communist expansion in Asia, the United States should exploit every opportunity to increase the present Western orientation of the area and to assist, within our capabilities, its governments in their efforts to meet the minimum aspirations of their people and to maintain internal security." 81/

Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming, by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible, but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

b. The U.S. Enters the War

On December 30, 1949, the French signed over ten separate implementing agreements relating to the transfer of internal administration in Vietnam to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, in accordance with the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949. By January, 1950, Mao's legions had reached Vietnam's northern frontier, and North Vietnam was moving into the Sino-Soviet orbit. A Department of State telegram reviewed U.S. policy as of 20 January 1950:



"DEPT still hopeful Bao Dai will succeed in gaining increasing popular support at Ho's expense and our policy remains essentially the same; to encourage him and to urge FR toward further concessions.

"The start made by Bao Dai, the qualities exhibited by him, and his initial reception seem to have been better than we might have anticipated, even discounting optimism of FR sources. Transfer of power apparently well received. FR success in disarming and interning fleeing CHI Nationalists without serious intervention to the present by CHI COMMIES also encouraging.

"However, more recently, marked opposition has been encountered which demonstrates at least that Bao Dai's popular support has not yet widened. Increased Viet Minh MIL activity is disquieting. This CID be special effort by Ho, timed to coincide with transfer of power and the arrival of CHI COMMIES armies on frontier, and to precede Bangkok Conference, or CID be evidence of increasing strength reinforced by hopes of CHI COMMIE support, direct or indirect.

"DEPT has as yet no knowledge of negotiations between Ho and Mao groups although radio intercept of New China News Agency release of JAN 17 indicates that Ho has messaged the 'GOVTS of the world' that 'the GOVT of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is the only legal GOVT of the Vietnam people' and is 'ready to establish DIPL relations with any GOVT which WLD be willing to cooperate with her on the basis of equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory so as to defend world peace and democracy. Ho's radio making similar professions....

"Nature and timing of recognition of Bao Dai now under consideration here and with other GOVTS...." 82/

First the Chinese Communists, and then the Soviets recognized the DRV. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

"The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

"Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, we have every reason to believe that those legal

governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

"French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal governments by the countries of the world whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas. Ambassador Jessup has already expressed to Emperor Bao Dai our best wishes for prosperity and stability in Vietnam, and the hope that closer relationship will be established between Vietnam and the United States." 83/

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950. President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai the same date, and on 4 February, the American Consul General in Saigon was instructed to deliver the following message to Bao Dai:

"Your Imperial Majesty:

"I have Your Majesty's letter in which I am informed of the signing of the agreements of March 8, 1949 between Your Majesty, on behalf of Vietnam, and the President of the French Republic, on behalf of France. My Government has also been informed of the ratification on February 2, 1950 by the French Government of the agreements of March 8, 1949.

"Since these acts establish the Republic of Vietnam as an independent State within the French Union, I take this opportunity to congratulate Your Majesty and the people of Vietnam on this happy occasion.

"The Government of the United States of America is pleased to welcome the Republic of Vietnam into the community of peace-loving nations of the world and to extend diplomatic recognition to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. I look forward to an early exchange of diplomatic representatives between our two countries...." 84/

Recognition of Bao Dai was followed swiftly by French requests for U.S. aid. On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson released the following statement in Paris:

"The [French] Foreign Minister and I have just had an exchange of views on the situation in Indochina and are in general agreement both as to the urgency of the situation in that area and as to the necessity for remedial action. We have noted the



fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos which now enjoy independence within the French Union is primarily the responsibility of France and the Governments and peoples of Indochina. The United States recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives.

"The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." 85/

On May 11, 1950, the Acting Secretary of State made the following statement:

"A special survey mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, has just returned from Southeast Asia and reported on economic and technical assistance needed in that area. Its over-all recommendations for the area are modest and total in the neighborhood of \$60 million. The Department is working on plans to implement that program at once.

"Secretary Acheson on Monday in Paris cited the urgency of the situation applying in the associates states of Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia. The Department is working jointly with ECA to impelment the economic and technical assistance recommendations for Indochina as well as the other states of Southeast Asia and anticipates that this program will get underway in the immediate future.

"Military assistance for Southeast Asia is being worked out by the Department of Defense in cooperation with the Department of State, and the details will not be made public for security reasons.

"Military assistance needs will be met from the President's emergency fund of \$75 million provided under MDAP for the general area of China.

"Economic assistance needs will be met from the ECA China Aid funds, part of which both Houses of Congress have indicated will be made available for the general area of China. Final

legislative action is still pending on this authorization  
but is expected to be completed within the next week." 86/

The United States thereafter was directly involved in the developing  
tragedy in Vietnam.



THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

SUMMARY

One of the recurrent themes of criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam has been that from the end of World War II on, there was a failure to recognize that the Viet Minh was the principal vehicle for Vietnamese nationalism and that it, in fact, was in control of and effectively governing all of Vietnam. Evidence on issues like popularity and control is always somewhat suspect--especially when dealing with an exotic country like Vietnam at a time when what Americans knew about it was largely dependent on French sources. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made and supported.

First, the Viet Minh was the main repository of Vietnamese nationalism and anti-French colonialism. There were other such groups promoting Viet independence but none were competitive on a country-wide scale. It is also true that the disciplined, well-organized, and well-led Indochinese Communist Party was the controlling element in the Viet Minh. The ICP was not, however, in the numerical majority either in total membership or in leadership posts held. This gap between control and numbers can be explained by two factors: (a) ICP strategy was to unify nationalist elements to achieve the immediate objective of independence; and (b) the other components of the Viet Minh were sizable enough to fractionalize the whole movement. In other words, from World War II on, the ICP was strong enough to lead, but not to dominate Vietnamese nationalism.

Second, the Viet Minh was sufficiently popular and effective to turn itself into a Vietnam-wide government that could have extended its authority throughout the country after World War II--except for the obstacle of reasserted French power, and, to a lesser degree, of indigenous political opposition in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh was always more powerful in Tonkin and Annam than in South Vietnam. However, it seems likely that in the absence of the French, the Viet Minh through its governmental creation, the DRV, would have overridden indigenous tribal, religious, and other opposition in short order.

Vietnamese nationalism developed three types of political parties or movements:

Reform parties. Narrowly based among the small educated Vietnamese elite, these parties made little pretense at representing the masses of the peasantry--except in the ancient mandarin sense of

paternal leadership. In general, they advocated reform of the relationship between France and Vietnam to establish an independent and united nation, but would neither sever beneficial bonds with the metropole, nor alter drastically the Vietnamese social structure. Members included many men of impeccable repute and undoubted nationalist convictions--among them Ngo Dinh Diem--but also a number of known opportunist and corrupt Vietnamese. The reformist parties were further discredited by collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. These parties formed the basis for the "Bao Dai solution" to which France and the U.S. gravitated in the late 1940's.

Theocratic parties. In Cochinchina--and almost exclusively there--during the 1930's there emerged religious sects commanding firm loyalties of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Two of these--the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao--aspired to temporal as well as spiritual power, fielded armed forces, and formed local governments. They opposed both French political and cultural hegemony, and domination by other Vietnamese parties. Some elements collaborated openly with the Japanese during 1940-1945. Because these parties were of local and religious character, any parallel with other Viet political organizations would be inexact. These movements account in large measure for the distinctive character of South Vietnamese nationalism as compared with that of Annam or Tonkin.

Revolutionary parties. The numerous remaining Vietnamese political parties fall into the revolutionary category: they advocated Vietnam's independence from France and some degree of radical reorganization of the Viet polity. Their political coloration ranged from the deep red of the Saigon-centered Trotskyites (who advocated anti-imperialist revolution throughout the world, and within Vietnam, expropriation for the workers and peasants) through the less violent hues of communism and Kuomintang-styled nationalism, to the indistinct, eclectic nationalism of the Binh Xuyen criminal fraternity (another Saigon phenomenon). Only two of these movements developed a Vietnam-wide influence: the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), and the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Both of these parties were troubled throughout their history by factionalism, and by repeated (French police) purges. Both aspired to politicizing the peasants; neither wholly succeeded. Of the two, the ICP consistently demonstrated the greater resiliency and popularity, attributable to superior conspiratorial doctrine and technique, and to more coherent and astute leadership. Both the ICP and the VNQDD figured in peasant uprisings in 1930-1931, and 1940-1941. Each played a role in the Vietnamese resistance against the Vichy French and the Japanese during World War II: the ICP as the nucleus of the Viet Minh, and the VNQDD as the principal component of the Chinese Nationalist-sponsored Dong Minh Hoi.

The Viet Minh--Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, League for the Independence of Vietnam--came into being in May, 1941, at the 8th Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party, held in South China. It was formed as a "united front" organization with Ho Chi Minh at its head, and was



initially composed of the ICP, Revolutionary Youth League, the New Vietnam Party, and factions of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Membership was held open to any other individuals or groups willing to join in struggling for "national liberation." The announced program of the Viet Minh called for a wide range of social and political reforms designed mainly to appeal to Viet patriotism. Emphasis was placed on an anti-Japanese crusade and preparation for "an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps," not on communist cant.

Though a Kuomintang general originally sponsored the Viet Minh, Ho soon became suspect, and in 1942 was jailed by the Chinese. While he was in prison, probably to offset the Viet Minh's growing appeal, and to assure tighter Chinese control of the Vietnamese, the KMT fostered a rival Viet "popular front," the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), which was based on the VNQDD, the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet), and a number of smaller groups, but was supposed to include the Viet Minh. In fact, however, the Dong Minh Hoi never acquired more than a nominal control over the Viet Minh. In 1943, Ho was released from prison and put in charge of the Dong Minh Hoi--a status apparently conditioned on his accepting overall Chinese guidance and providing the allies with intelligence. But as the war progressed, Ho and the Viet Minh drew apart from the Dong Minh Hoi, and the latter never succeeded in acquiring apparatus within Vietnam comparable to the Viet Minh's.

During the war, some Vietnamese political parties collaborated with the Japanese or the Vichy French. These were put at a disadvantage during and after the war in competition with the ICP, the Viet Minh, or the Dong Minh Hoi--all of which developed an aura of unwavering faith to resistance against all foreign domination. But only the ICP and the Viet Minh established their reputations by extensive wartime operations among the people of Vietnam. In Cochinchina, up until surfacing in April 1945, the ICP continued to operate largely underground and without much regard for the Viet Minh mantle; in Annam and Tonkin, however, all ICP undertakings were given Viet Minh identity. Throughout Vietnam, the ICP initiated patient political action: the dissemination of propaganda, the training of cadres, the establishment of a network of cells down to hamlet level. The ICP was during the war the hard core of the Viet Minh, but the bulk of the Viet Minh membership were no doubt quite unaware of that fact: they served the Viet Minh out of a patriotic fervor.

The American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, depending upon it for reliable intelligence, and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. However, the Viet Minh itself assigned priority to political tasks ahead of these military missions. The first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942-43 in the mountains north of Hanoi. Only after its political network was well established did it field its first guerrilla forces, in September 1943. The first units of the Viet Minh Liberation Army came into being on December 22, 1944, and there is little



evidence of large scale, concerted guerrilla operations until after March 1945.

At the end of 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a total membership of 500,000, of which 200,000 were in Tonkin, 150,000 in Annam, and 150,000 in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh political and military structure was significantly further developed in North Vietnam. In May 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border. As the war drew to a close the Viet Minh determined to preempt allied occupation, and to form a government prior to their arrival. The Viet Minh ability to do so proved better in the north than in the south. In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh's forces seized power from the Japanese and Bao Dai in North Vietnam, forced the emperor to abdicate, and to cede his powers to Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In Cochinchina, however, the Viet Minh were able to gain only tenuous control of Saigon and its environs. Nonetheless, when the allies arrived, the Viet Minh were the de facto government in both North and South Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh and his DRV in Hanoi, and an ICP-dominated "Committee of the South" in Saigon.

On 12 September 1945, the British landed a Gurkha battalion and a company of Free French soldiers in Saigon. The British commander regarded the Vietnamese government with disdain because of its lack of authority from the French and because of its inability to quell civil disorder in South Vietnam. Saigon police clashed with Trotskyites, and in the rural areas, fighting broke out between Viet Minh troops and those of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. Spreading violence rendered futile further attempts to draw together the Vietnamese factions, and prompted the French to implore the British commander to permit them to step in to restore order. On the morning of 23 September, French troops overthrew the Vietnamese government after a tenure of only three weeks. The official British account termed the French method of executing the coup d'etat "unfortunate" in that they "absolutely ensured that countermeasures would be taken by the [Vietnamese]...." Vietnamese retaliation was quick and violent: over one hundred Westerners were slain in the first few days, and others kidnapped; on 26 September, the U.S. commander of the O.S.S. in Saigon was killed. Thus, the first Indochina War began in Cochinchina in late September, 1945, and American blood was shed in its opening hours.

At that juncture, the ICP in Cochinchina was in a particularly vulnerable position. The ICP had permitted the Viet Minh to pose as an arm of the Allies, and had supported cooperation with the British and amnesty for the French. The Party had even undertaken, through the Committee of the South, to repress the Trotskyites. But violence undermined its advocacy of political moderation, of maintaining public order, and of negotiations with the French. Further, the ICP in Saigon was assured by French communists that they would receive no assistance from Party brethren abroad. The French coup d'etat thrust conflict upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists was how to respond; the ICP leadership determined that violence was the sole



recourse, and that to maintain leadership of the nationalist movement in South Vietnam they had to make the Viet Minh the most unbending foe of compromise with the French.

The situation in all of Vietnam at the end of the war was confused--neither the French, nor the Viet Minh, nor any other group exercised clear authority. While the Viet Minh was far and away the single most powerful Vietnamese organization, and while it claimed dominion over all Vietnam, its authority was challenged in the North by the Chinese and in the South by the British. The French position was patently more tenuous than that of the Viet Minh until 9 October 1945. On that date, France and the UK concluded an agreement whereby the British formally recognized French civil administration in Indochina and ceded its occupation rights to France south of the 16th parallel. This ceding of authority in the South did not, as a practical matter, ensure French rule. With only 35,000 French soldiers in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh and other parties were well able to contest the French.

Viet Minh authority in Annam and Tonkin was less ambiguous, but by no means unchallenged. In the North, the salient political fact of life for the Viet Minh was the presence of the Chinese Nationalist Army of Occupation numbering 50,000 men. Through this presence, the Chinese were able to force the Viet Minh to accommodate Chinese-Viet Nationalists within the DRV and to defer to Chinese policy in other respects. The resultant situation in North Vietnam in the autumn of 1945 is depicted in the map on page B-41.

The Viet Minh had to go further still in accommodating the wishes of the Chinese. In setting up the DRV government of 2 September 1945, pro-Chinese, non-Viet Minh politicians were included, and the ICP took only 6 of 16 cabinet posts. On 11 November 1945, the Viet Minh leadership went even further, and formally dissolved the ICP in the interest of avoiding "misunderstandings." Even this, however, was not sufficient. Compelled by opposition demands, Ho agreed to schedule national elections for January of 1946. The results of these elections were arranged beforehand with the major opposition parties, and the Assembly thus "elected" met on 2 March 1946. This Assembly approved a new DRV government, with the ICP holding only 2 of 12 cabinet posts.

By then, France was ready to pose a stronger challenge. French reinforcements had arrived in Indochina, so that Paris could contemplate operations in North Vietnam as well as in Cochinchina. In early 1946, the Chinese turned over their occupation rights in the North to France. Faced with increased French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from abroad, Ho decided that he had no recourse save to negotiate with the French. On 6 March 1946, Ho signed an Accord with the French providing for French re-entry into Vietnam for five years in return for recognizing the DRV as a free state within the French union.

This Accord taxed Ho's popularity to the utmost, and it took all Ho's prestige to prevent open rebellion. On 27 May 1946, Ho countered these attacks by merging the Viet Minh into the Lien Viet, a larger, more embracing "national front." Amity within the Lien Viet, however, lasted only as long as the Chinese remained in North Vietnam. When they withdrew a few weeks later, in mid-June, the Viet Minh, supported by French troops, attacked the Dong Minh Hoi and the VNQDD, as "enemies of the peace," effectively suppressed organized opposition, and asserted Viet Minh control throughout North Vietnam.

But even this ascendancy proved transitory. Ho Chi Minh, though he tried hard, was unable to negotiate any durable modus vivendi with the French in the summer and fall of 1946. In the meantime, the DRV and the Viet Minh were drawn more and more under the control of the "Marxists" of the former ICP. For example, during the session of the DRV National Assembly in November, nominal opposition members were whittled down to 20 out of more than 300 seats, and a few "Marxists" dominated the proceedings. Nonetheless, the DRV government maintained at least a facade of coalition. A chart (pp. B51-55) of its leadership during 1945-1949 illustrates that through 1949, ICP members remained in the minority, and nominally oppositionist VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi politicians were consistently included.

Although the Cochinchina war continued throughout 1946, with the Viet Minh assuming a leading role in resistance, war in North Vietnam did not break out until December, 1946. A series of armed clashes in November were followed by a large scale fighting in Hanoi in late December. The DRV government took to the hills to assume the status of shadow state. The Viet Minh transformed itself back into a semi-covert resistance organization and committed itself throughout the nation to the military defeat of the French. During the opening year of the war, 1947, the Viet Minh took steps to restore its image as a popular, patriotic, anti-foreign movement, and again to play down the ICP role in its leadership. The DRV government was reorganized and prominent communists excluded. As the Viet Minh gathered strength over the years, however, these same leaders reentered the DRV government.

In February 1951, addressing the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), Ho Chi Minh stated that the Communist Party had formed and led the Viet Minh, and founded and ruled the DRV. When the French colonialists reappeared in South Vietnam and a Nationalist Chinese-sponsored government seemed in prospect in North Vietnam, Ho averred, the Party went underground, and entered into agreements with the French:

"Lenin said that even if a compromise with bandits was advantageous to the revolution, he would do it...."



But Ho's explanation notwithstanding, the Viet Minh was irrefutably nationalist, popular, and patriotic. It was also the most prominent and successful vehicle of Viet nationalism in the 1940's. To a degree it was always non-communist. Available evidence indicates, however, that from its inception, Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants of the Indochinese Communist Party conceived its strategy, directed its operations, and channeled its energies consistent with their own goals--as they subsequently claimed. Whether the non-communist elements of the Viet Minh might have become dominant in different circumstances must be relegated to speculation. It seems clear that, as matters developed, all of the non-communist nationalist movements--reformist, theocratic, or revolutionary--were too localized, too disunited, or too tainted with Japanese or Nationalist Chinese associations to have competed successfully with the ICP for control of the Viet Minh. And none could compete effectively with the Viet Minh in gaining a following among Vietnam's peasants.

THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINHTABLE OF CONTENTS

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1. Origins of the Viet Minha. Pre-World War II Vietnamese Political Movements(1) The Political Situation During the 1920's and 1930's

In eighty years of French domination of Vietnam there had been no increase in per-acre yield of rice, so that the comparative fertility of Vietnam's fields were, in 1940, the lowest in the world. 1/ Viet population increased at double the expansion in rice production from cultivating new land. Thus, French contentions that their imperium had uplifted the Vietnamese notwithstanding, there is no evidence that they improved popular diet, or solved the problem of recurrent famine. In fact, the rural peasants were in 1940 socially disadvantaged in comparison with their ancestors, in that the pre-colonial mandarin society with its subsistence economy had better provided for their basic political, economic and social needs. Moreover, the neomercantilism of France had, in fact, given the Banque d'Indochine a key role in colonial policy. The Banque was a virtual French monopoly, nearly as baleful an influence over the Vietnamese as the communists depicted it; at least, with the colonial administration, it defended the French economic position through blocking Vietnamese social and political mobility. Vietnamese entered legitimate domestic businesses under severe handicaps, and were all but foreclosed from foreign commerce. Few descriptions of pre-World War II Vietnam by non-French authors fail to portray a colonialism like that depicted by Karl Marx. For example, the Austrian-American authority, Joseph Buttinger, characterized the state of Viet society and politics in the late 1930's as follows:

"Pauperization was the lot of most peasants and of all tenants, not only in overpopulated Tongking and Annam, but also in Cochinchina, which was so much richer than the other four Indochinese states that it contributed 40 per cent to the general budget. The economic burdens of French rule, according to a contemporary English writer, 'were shouldered principally by the rural population, and the fiscal demands, together with the increasing birthrate, led to a progressive pauperization of the countryside, a process illustrated by the fact that rural indebtedness in Cochinchina alone increased from 31 million piasters in 1900 to 134 million piasters in 1930.'

"There is, however, no more devastating verdict on the failure of the French to combat rural poverty than the dry statement of another French authority on living conditions in Vietnam. 'It is only in periods of intense agricultural labor,' wrote E. Lerich in a study published in 1942, 'which means during

one-third of the year and particularly during the harvest, that the people have enough to eat.'

"The peasant's painful efforts, wrote an exceedingly tame Vietnamese nationalist during the 1920's, are not rewarded with sufficient well-being, so he 'dreams of more happiness, of more justice.' There can be no doubt that he did. But what the moderate nationalists failed to see was that by 1930, a great many peasants were ready to proceed from dream to action. They would now have listened to any party whose leaders were ready to make the troubles of the poor their chief political concern. This, unfortunately, was grasped only by the communists. When they proclaimed that the struggle for independence could have meaning for the poor only if independence aimed at improving their social condition, the communists had won the first round in their fight for leadership of the nationalist camp." 2/

Communists were, however, not the only Vietnamese political movement actively seeking to change the French colonial relationship. Three categories of political forces can be identified:

Principal Vietnamese Political Movements, 1920 - 1940  
(with Dates of Activation) 3/

Parties Advocating Reform of the French System

Constitutionalist Party (1923)  
Vietnam People's Progressive Party (1923)  
Democratic Party (1937)  
Socialist Party (1936)

Theocratic Movements

Cao Daism (1920)  
Hoa Hao-ism (1939)

Parties Advocating Revolution and National Independence

Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927)  
Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1927) - disbanded 1930  
New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1928) - disbanded 1930  
Indochinese Communist Party (1930)  
Trotskyist Movement (1931)  
Vietnam Restoration League (1931)

The reformist parties were strongest in Cochinchina. There the French administered directly rather than through Vietnamese as in Annam or Tonkin, and, apparently feeling more secure in their control, tolerated in the South open Vietnamese political activism prohibited in central and north Vietnam. Nonetheless, no reformist movements acquired a popular base, and all were moribund at the start of World War II.



The theocratic movements were also Cochinchinese phenomena, but, unlike the reformist parties, commanded wide popular support. Cao Daism swiftly took hold in the late 20's and 30's, and became a genuine political force among the peasants in Tay Ninh Province (northwest of Saigon) and in the Mekong Delta. The Hoa Hao movement grew even more rapidly from its inception in the late 30's among the peasants of the Delta southwest of Saigon.

The revolutionary parties were, by contrast, concentrated chiefly in the North, their more radical and conspiratorial complexion reflecting both necessity -- given the repressive policies of the French and the mandarins through whom they ruled -- and foreign intellectual influences, especially those emanating from China, and from the universities in Hanoi and Hue. All the revolutionary parties were active among Vietnamese living abroad. The Vietnamese Restoration League was chiefly based in Japan (and eventually became the Japanese backed vehicle for Vietnamese entry into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere). The remainder were principally Chinese based, and strongly influenced by Sun Yat Sen's philosophy, Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang, and Mao Tse Tung's Chinese Communist Party. Of the group, only the Indochinese Communist Party and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party achieved real political power, but not even these were successful in dislodging French control; a brief recounting of their failures, however, reveals much concerning the political antecedents of modern Vietnam.

## (2) The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD)

The Viet Nam Quoc Tan Dang (VNQDD) was formed in 1927 chiefly out of dissatisfaction among young Vietnamese with movements, such as the ineffectual Revolutionary Association and the early communist organizations, which were dominated by men of mandarin or alien intellectual backgrounds. The VNQDD prided itself on identification with the Vietnamese peasantry, and modeled itself after the Kuomintang: cellular and covert, advocating Sun Yat Sen's program of "Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism." As the diagram (Figure 1) 4/ indicates, the history of the Nationalist Party is one of fragmentation -- both from factional disputes and from French counter-action -- and merger with other movements. In a fashion appealing to a people who value historic lineage, the Nationalist Party traced its origins to one of the few modern Vietnamese national heroes, Phan Boi Chau; to a Viet movement in Yunnan under Phan Boi Chau's disciple, Le Phu Hiep; and to a Kuomintang-oriented Vietnamese publishing house called the Annamese Library. The Nationalists initially were a Tonkin party, but became allied with the Vietnam Revolutionary Party of Annam (and, in a minor fashion, the same party in Cochinchina). The relationship never amounted to much more than liaison, and the Nationalists remained Tonkin-centered. There, however, they acquired a significant following, and succeeded in forming a number of cells among Vietnamese serving in the French armed forces. In 1930 the Nationalist Party leader, Nguyen Thai Hoc, ordered a mass uprising against the French. On February 10, 1930, the insurrection began with a mutiny of troops at

# HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM NATIONALIST PARTY

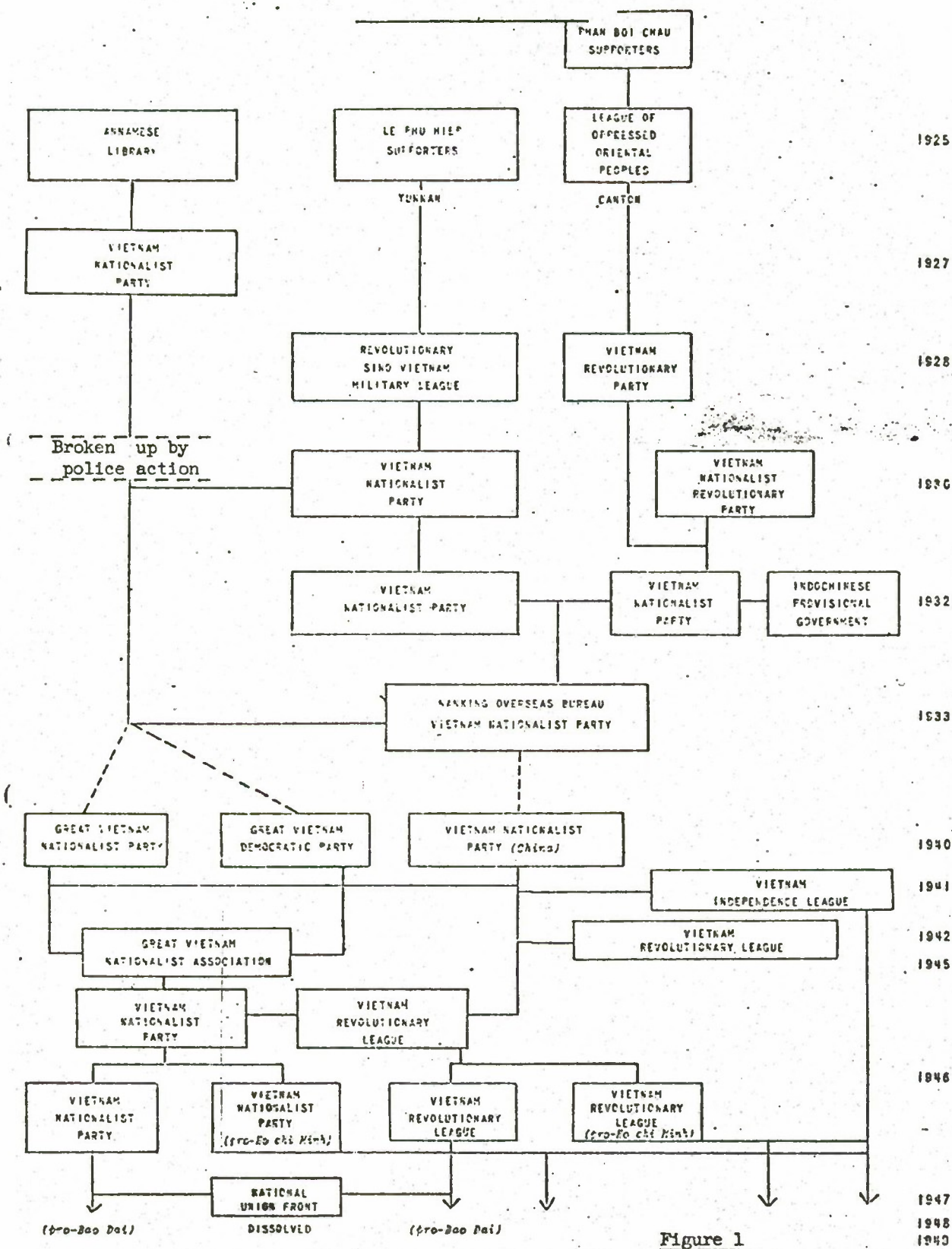


Figure 1



Yen Bay, and spread throughout Tonkin. The French reaction was quick, efficient and severe. Nguyen Thai Hoc was captured and executed, along with hundreds of lesser Nationalists; others fled to China. By 1932, Nationalist Party remnants within Vietnam had been hounded into activity, and the Party thereafter centered on the exile community in China. By 1940, in a series of factional struggles, three main branches evolved: a pro-Japanese faction called the Great Vietnam Democratic Party (Dai Viet Dan Chinh); a faction re-established in Vietnam called the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang); and a Kunming faction under Vu Khong Khanh bearing the original VNQDD name. The latter group survived the war, and became important in its aftermath.

### (3) The Primacy of the Indochinese Communist Party

The disunity, vulnerability, and meanderings of the Nationalist Party -- notwithstanding its relative effectiveness compared with most other parties -- stands in contrast with the solidarity and resiliency of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). The main unifying factor of the communist movement was Ho Chi Minh, and the coterie of dedicated revolutionaries, most of whom he personally recruited, trained, and led. But important as was such leadership, doctrine and discipline also figured in communist success. Ho (then known as Nguyen Ai Quoc) participated in the founding of the French Communist Party, and after training in Moscow, formed the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League in Canton, primarily nationalist in announced aims (Figure 2). 5/ In its journal in 1926, however, Ho wrote that: "Only a communist party can insure the well-being of Annam," and he apparently began about that time training cadres for covert operations. By 1929, some 250 Vietnamese had been trained in Canton, and at least 200 had returned to Indochina to undertake organizational work; as of that year, some 1000 reported communists and collaborators indicated that 10% were in Cochinchina, some 20% in Annam, and the remainder in Tonkin. 6/ In 1929 communists sought fusion with the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party, and attacked the Nationalist Party (VNQDD) as a "bourgeois party." That same year, a faction of the Revolutionary Youth League formed an Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong + Cong San Dang), the first to bear the title. In 1930 the Revolutionary Youth League, some members of the socialist Nguyen An Ninh Association, and the exiled Annam Communist Party joined with the latter faction into first the Vietnam Communist Party, and then -- per Comintern wishes to broaden the party to embrace Laos and Cambodia -- a reorganized Indochinese Communist Party, which was recognized by the Comintern.

In the Nationalist-precipitated violence of 1930, about 1000 ICP members led 100,000 peasants in strikes, demonstrations, and open insurrection. In Ho's home province of Nghe An, peasant soviets were set up, landlords were killed, and large estates broken up -- methods so violent, so tainted with pillage and murder, that the Comintern objected that they were not in consonance with "organized violence" of Marxist doctrine. 7/ Again, however, French counteraction was swift and telling. French police destroyed overt apparatus of the ICP in Vietnam during 1930 and 1931, and

# DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1921-31

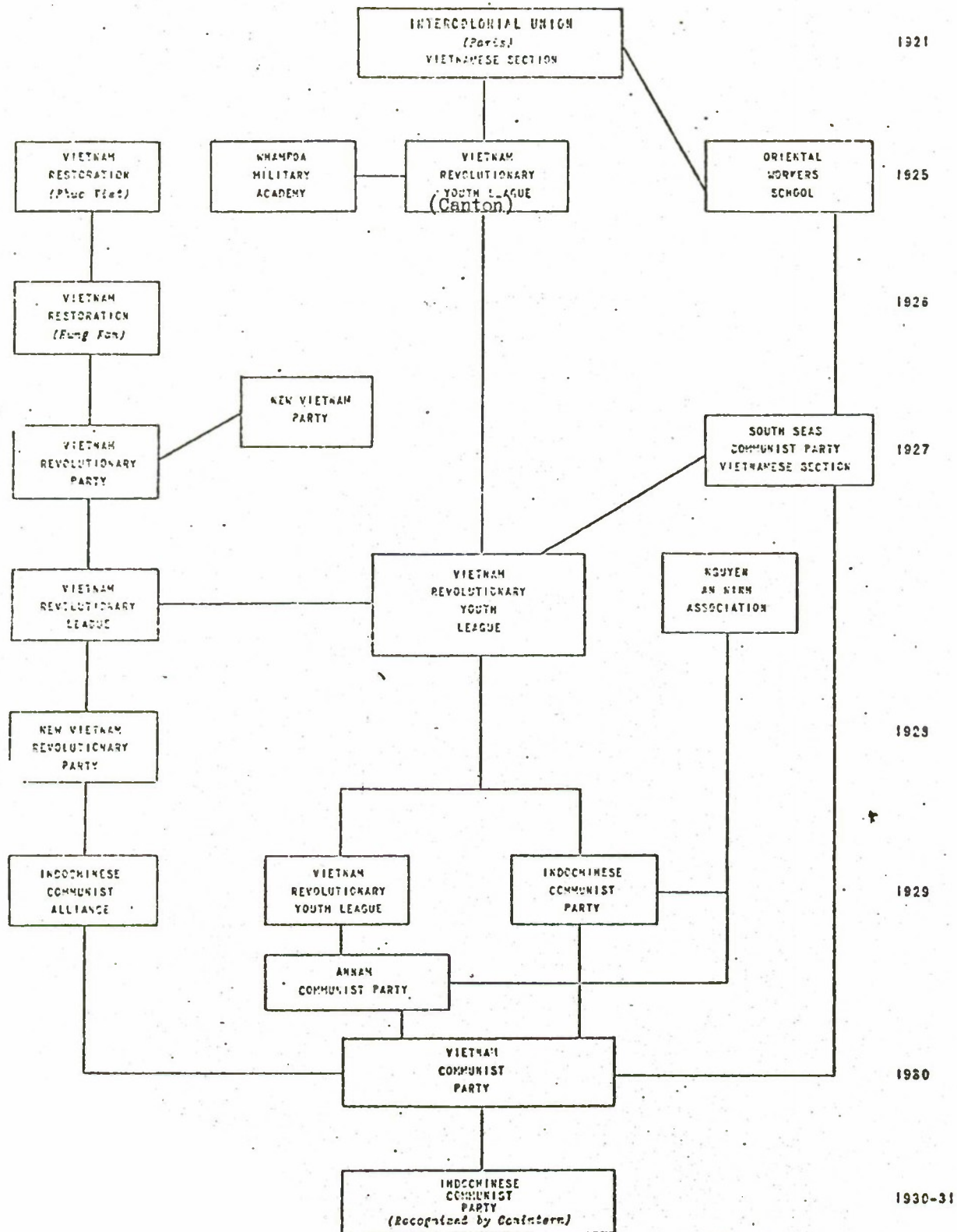


Figure 2



on their request, Ho Chi Minh was arrested by the British in Hong Kong. Attempts at party reorganization in 1932 were met by renewed police repression, and not until 1933 were communists again permitted political activity of any sort. The party, however, did revive, establishing a new foothold in more permissive Cochinchina, under Tran Van Giau (Figure 3). 8/ Tran there formed the League Against Imperialism, a front organization specifically non-violent in its program designed to attract support from the political center and right. In 1935, following the Comintern Seventh World Congress, the ICP centered itself on Saigon, and launched an Indochinese Congress "Democratic Front," paralleling the communists' Popular Front movement in metropolitan France. Almost immediately, however, Trotskyite elements, advocating "permanent revolution," split with the ICP leadership, and began to press an independent, more revolutionary line.

The Trotskyites were divided within themselves into the "Struggle" Group and the "October" Group, differing mainly in the degree to which they countenanced cooperation with the ICP. In 1937 a Trotskyite candidate, Tu Thu Thau, together with an ICP leader, Nguyen Van Tao, was elected to the Saigon Municipal Council. By 1939 Trotskyite elements had drawn together into one party, and that year a Trotskyite slate won 80% of votes cast in a Cochinchinese election -- a severe defeat for the ICP which led Nguyen Van Tao to set up another communist splinter party.

The divisions within the communist movement of Vietnam during the 1930's, as well as the ICP willingness to subordinate its doctrinal abhorrence of both the French and the bourgeoisie for short term goals, are evident in the following report on "The Party's Line in the Period of the Democratic Front (1936-1939)" submitted by Nguyen Ai Quoc (alias of Ho Chi Minh) in July, 1939:

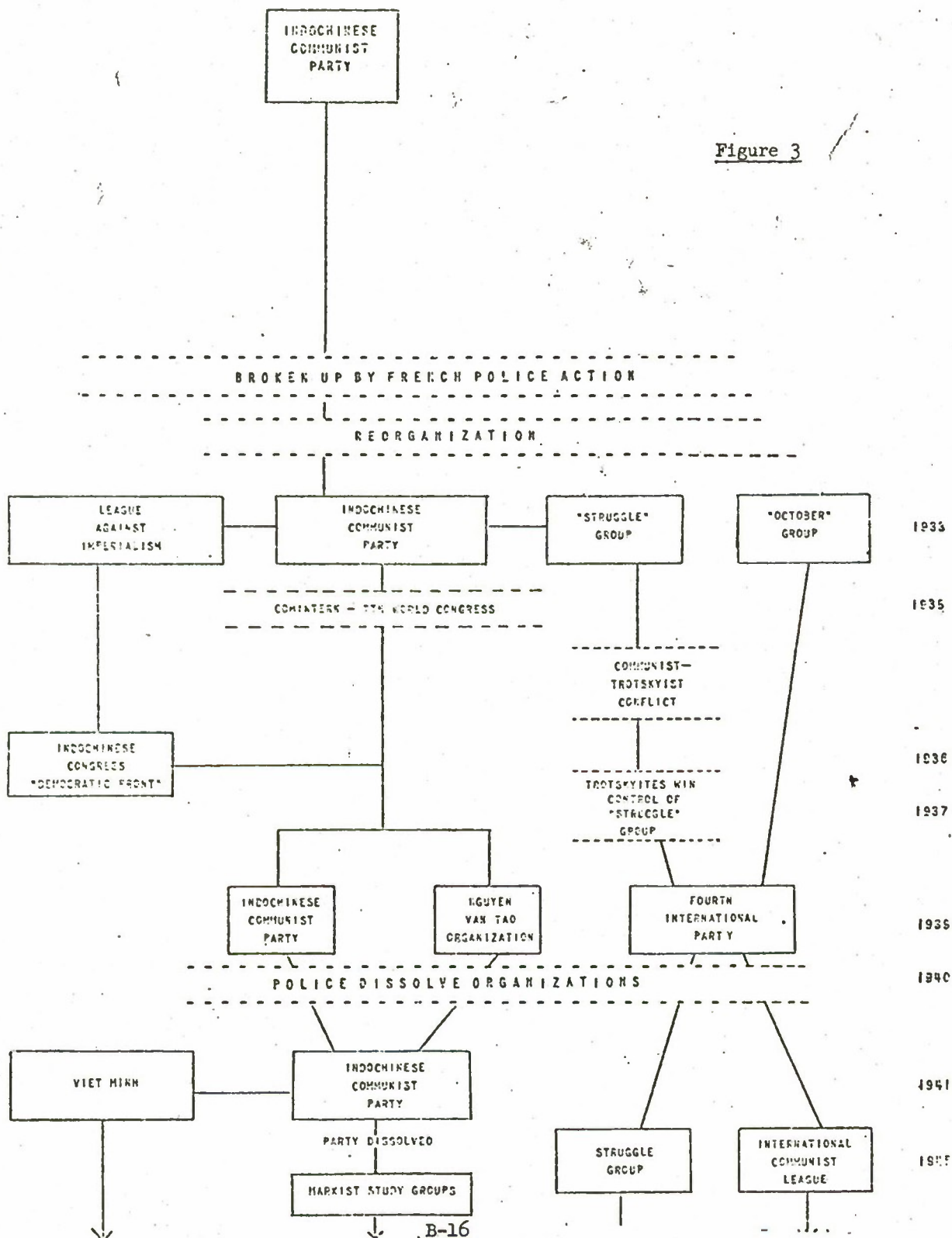
"1. For the time being, the Party cannot put forth too high a demand (national independence, parliament, etc.). To do so is to enter the Japanese fascists' scheme. It should only claim for democratic rights, freedom of organization, freedom of assembly, freedom of press and freedom of speech, general amnesty for all political detainees, and struggle for the legalization of the Party.

"2. To reach this goal, the Party must strive to organize a broad Democratic National Front. This Front does not embrace only Indochinese people but also progressive French residing in Indochina; not only toiling people but also the national bourgeoisie.

"3. The Party must assume a wise, flexible attitude with the bourgeoisie, strive to draw it into the Front, win over the elements that can be won over and neutralize those which can be neutralized. We must by all means avoid leaving them outside the Front, lest they should fall into the hands of the enemy of the revolution and increase the strength of the reactionaries.

# DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1931-45

Figure 3





"4. There cannot be any alliance with or any concession to the Trotskyite group. We must do everything possible to lay bare their faces as henchmen of the fascists and annihilate them politically.

"5. To increase and consolidate its forces, to widen its influence, and to work effectively, the Indochinese Democratic Front must keep close contact with the French Popular Front because the latter also struggles for freedom, democracy, and can give us great help.

"6. The Party cannot demand that the Front recognizes its leadership. It must instead show itself as the organ which makes the greatest sacrifices, the most active and loyal organ. It is only through daily struggle and work that the masses of the people acknowledge the correct policies and leading capacity of the Party and that it can win the leading position.

"7. To be able to carry out this task, the Party must uncompromisingly fight sectarianism and narrow-mindedness and organize systematic study of Marxism-Leninism in order to raise the cultural and political level of the Party members and help the non-Party cadres raise their level. We must maintain close contact with the French Communist Party.

"8. The Central Executive Committee must supervise the Party press to avoid technical and political mistakes. (E.g., in publishing comrade R's biography, the Lao-Dong revealed his address and his origin, etc. It also published without comment his letter saying that Trotskyism is a product of boastfulness, etc.)." 9/

In August, 1939, however, the Hitler-Stalin alliance was contracted, and the following month all varieties of communists, both domestic and colonial, were declared anathema by the French. In Vietnam, communist organizations were once more thoroughly destroyed by police action, the Trotskyites suffering particularly. 10/ Once the covert segments of the ICP survived.

That the ICP endured the French purges of 1930 - 1932 and 1939 - 1940 testifies to its strength, for the same attacks emasculated the VNQDD and all other revolutionary Vietnamese political parties. At the outset of World War II, the ICP enjoyed a virtual monopoly on organized Vietnamese nationalism, a position attributable to (1) ruthlessness of the French in eliminating competition; (2) superior communist discipline, training, and hence, survivability; (3) inherently better communist strategy and tactics for balking the French colonial administration and mobilizing popular opinions; and (4) French tolerance of "popular front" communists generated by the ascendancy of the Left in metropolitan France during the mid-30's. The French, by denying political expression to moderate Vietnamese nationalists, polarized native political sentiments, and invited popular support of the more vehement and radical solutions proffered by the ICP.

b. World War II and the Viet Minh

(1) Formation of the Independence League, 1941

The fall of France in June 1940 was followed immediately by a Japanese demand for permission to occupy Indochina. On 19 June 1940, Japan presented the French the first of a series of ultimatums, which culminated, after some ungraceful maneuvering by the Vichy government, in an order signed September 2, 1940, by Marshall Petain, directing the colonial administration to negotiate terms by which Japanese armed forces might enter Indochina and use military bases there. Within the month, after demonstrations by the Japanese Navy off the Tonkin coast, and an actual invasion of Tonkin from China by the Japanese Army, the terms sought by the Japanese were forthcoming. The French ruled in Vietnam as hosts to the Japanese until 1945, but the presence of Japanese bayonets rendered their sovereignty largely titular. The Vichy administration under Rice Admiral Jean Decoux developed a peculiarly Indochinese French nationalism which dignified its client status, extolled France's tutelage functions for the Vietnamese, and foreclosed any concessions whatever to native aspirations for political independence. Above all, it attempted to preserve the fiction that the Japanese had been stationed in Indochina with its permission. Admiral Decoux held that:

"A country is not occupied if it keeps its own army free in its movements, if its government and all the wheels of its administration function freely and without impediment, if its general services and particularly its police and security forces remain firmly in the hands of the sovereign authority and outside of all foreign interference." 11/

But, the very emphasis the Vichy government placed upon its "freedom" dramatized among Viet patriots the extent of its collaboration. It was soon evident that the Decoux regime served the purposes of Japanese policy, and was "free" only to the degree the Japanese chose. Early in 1941 Japan countenanced a Thai invasion of Laos and Cambodia. French military action was successful in halting the Thais, but the Japanese, requiring Thai cooperation for their drive into Malaya, forced the French to grant Thailand all the territory it sought. On May 6, 1961, the first of a series of Franco-Japanese commercial treaties was signed, which had the effect of diverting from France to Japan all the exploitive gains from French colonial enterprise, without Indochina's receiving in return such goods as it normally received in trade from France. Japanese armed forces were granted full run of the country, and after December 7, 1941, Decoux declared Indochina part of the "~~Greater~~ East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

The Japanese entry into Indochina kindled, in 1940 and 1941, Vietnamese insurrections against the French, who now appeared more reprehensible and vulnerable than ever. Too, some Vietnamese nationalists had long looked to the Japanese to liberate their nation. The communists were apparently undecided whether to risk another premature insurrection. While it appears



that the Central Committee of the ICP may have actually ordered subordinate echelons to refrain from violence, communists, first in Cochinchina, and then in Tonkin, led armed uprisings. The results were disastrous for the rebels. The Japanese, who probably encouraged the revolts to the extent they could, stood aside while the French reacted swiftly and savagely to crush the Vietnamese. 12/ Numerous ICP and other nationalist leaders died in the fighting, or in the harsh ministrations of French colonial justice which followed. The outcome of the rebellions of 1940 and 1941 was thus yet another French purge, exile of Vietnamese nationalist movements. While small scale covert operations continued in Vietnam, party headquarters were forced to move abroad, mostly to Nationalist China. In 1946, the Vietnamese government published a tract which acknowledged its debt to China:

"Thus it came to pass that southern China became the by-word of all Vietnam revolutionists. It was the birthplace of the Vietnam revolutionary movement, the base from where were directed all revolutionary activities 'beyond the border' -- on Vietnam's own territory." 13/

Chinese motives for sponsoring the Vietnamese nationalists included a desire to acquire intelligence of Japanese forces on their southern flank, and to tie down Japanese through sabotage and other operations in Indochina; there may have been a longer range interest in political influence over postwar Indochina.

In May, 1941, the head of the ICP, Nguyen Ai Quoc -- the person later to be called Ho Chi Minh -- convened the Eighth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee to approve the forming of a new united front organization to which Vietnamese patriots wishing to resist the Japanese and oppose the French might rally. The Party meeting was followed by a "congress" of Vietnamese nationalists who had recently escaped from their homeland, and others who had been in exile for years; there were also representatives of the "national liberation associations" of workers, peasants, soldiers, women, and youth -- most of them ICP organized and dominated. The "congress" adopted the recommendations of the ICP leaders, and established the Vietnam Independence League, Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, which became known as the Viet Minh. Nguyen Ai Quoc was named General Secretary of the new League, and most of its key positions were assigned to ICP members. Nguyen Ai Quoc issued a letter on the occasion, including the following appeal:

"Compatriots throughout the country! Rise up quickly! Let us follow the heroic example of the Chinese people! Rise up quickly to organize the Association for National Salvation to fight the French and the Japanese.

"Elders!

"Prominent personalities!

"Some hundreds of years ago, when our country was endangered by the Mongolian invasion, our elders under the Tran dynasty rose up

indignantly and called on their sons and daughters throughout the country to rise as one in order to kill the enemy. Finally they saved their people from danger, and their good name will be carried into posterity for all time. The elders and prominent personalities of our country should follow the example set by our forefathers in the glorious task of national salvation.

"Rich people, soldiers, workers, peasants, intellectuals, employees, traders, youth, and women who warmly love your country! At the present time national liberation is the most important problem. Let us unite together! As one in mind and strength we shall overthrow the Japanese and French and their jackals in order to save people from the situation between boiling water and burning heat.

"Dear compatriots!

"National salvation is the common cause to the whole of our people. Every Vietnamese must take part in it. He who has money will contribute his money, he who has strength will contribute his strength, he who has talent will contribute his talent. I pledge to use all my modest abilities to follow you, and am ready for the last sacrifice.

"Revolutionary fighters!

"The hour has struck! Raise aloft the insurrectionary banner and guide the people throughout the country to overthrow the Japanese and French! The sacred call of the Fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of our heroic predecessors who sacrificed their lives is stirring in your hearts! The fighting spirit of the people is displayed everywhere before you! Let us rise up quickly! United with each other, unify your action to overthrow the Japanese and the French.

"Victory to Viet-Nam's Revolution!

"Victory to the World's Revolution!" 14/

## (2) Component Parties and Program

The Viet Minh was originally an "anti-fascist" league of the following Viet nationalist groups:

- The New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Dang)
- The Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Thanh Nhien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi)
- Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD) (Only certain factions of this party elected to join the Viet Minh)



-- The several "National Liberation Associations"

-- The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)

Beginning in October, 1940, the Central Committee of the ICP had withdrawn its specifically communist slogans (e.g., "To confiscate landlords' lands and distribute it to the tillers," was toned down to "Confiscation of the land owned by traitors for distribution to the poor farmers.") and had begun instead to emphasize "national liberation." 15/ Within the Viet Minh, "national liberation" became central to the Party program, but the ICP from the outset dominated the league. According to Vo Nguyen Giap, the Party set political goals for the Viet Minh at the expense of its historic "anti-feudal task," but necessarily:

"To rally the different strata of the people and the national revolutionary forces in the struggle against the main enemy, that is the French and Japanese fascist imperialists..."

"It is precisely for this reason [emphasis on national liberation] that within a short period, the Viet Minh gathered together the great forces of the people and became the most powerful political organization of the broad revolutionary masses." 16/

By 1943, the Viet Minh was in fact attracting a broad spectrum of nationalists and intelligentsia, as well as extending its organization steadily among the peasants. A 1946 official history presented this formulation of its program at that time:

"At a conference in 1943, delegates of all anti-fascist revolutionary organizations adopted the following political program: (1) Election of a constituent assembly to work out the constitution for a free Indo-China on the basis of adult suffrage; (2) Restoration of democratic liberties and rights, including freedom of organization, press and assembly, freedom of belief and opinion, the right to property, the right of workers to strike, freedom of domicile and freedom of propaganda; (3) The organization of a national army; (4) The right of minorities to self-determination; (5) Equal rights for women; (6) Nationalization of banks belonging to fascists and the formation of an Indo-Chinese national bank; (7) The building up of a strong national economy by the development of native industry, communications, agriculture and commerce; (8) Agricultural reforms and the extension of cultivation to fallow lands; (9) Labor legislation, including the introduction of the eight-hour working day and progressive reforms in social legislation; (10) Development of national education and culture."

"In the international sphere the program stands for the revision of unequal treaties and an alliance with all democratic nations for the maintenance of peace. More important for the

anti-Japanese war, however, is the immediate program of action which is: (1) Organization of the masses -- workers, peasants, women, and youth -- for the anti-fascist struggle. This has already attained promising successes. (2) Preparation of an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps. (3) The formation of guerrilla bands and bases 'which will assume greater importance as we gradually approach the time of country-wide military action.'" 17/

### (3) Competitive Parties

#### (a) Dong Minh Hoi

From the outset, the Chinese were suspicious of the Viet Minh. In 1942, they arrested Nguyen Ai Quoc, and imprisoned him. In October, 1942, more than one year after the founding of the Viet Minh, the Kuomintang sponsored a second "united front" of Vietnamese nationalists named the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi). Colocated with headquarters of the Viet Minh in Kwangsi Province, China, Luichow, the Dong Minh Hoi -- as it came to be known -- included:

- The Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNDD)
- The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi)
- The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang)
- The Viet Minh
- The Liberation League (Giai Phong Hoi)

The Dong Minh Hoi was launched with the official sanction of Marshall Chang Fa-kuei, the quasi-autonomous Chinese warlord; its initial program was expressly modeled after the Kuomintang's Three People's Principles of Sun Yat Sen, and its paramilitary organizations were established with a view to close cooperation with the Nationalist Army. However, after more than a year in prison, Nguyen Ai Quoc was released by the Chinese -- perhaps on Chang Fa-kuei's orders, and without knowledge or sanction of Chiang Kai-Shek's headquarters -- and installed, under the new alias of Ho Chi Minh, as Chairman of the Dong Minh Hoi. The Viet Minh alone profitted by this duality of leadership. Only in the person of Ho Chi Minh, and in Luichow itself, was there any merger of the two "united front" organizations. Afield, and especially in Tonkin, they competed -- and occasionally fought -- with one another.

The Dong Minh Hoi acquired only modest political and military power in Vietnam, and became a significant political factor there only after Chinese Nationalist forces occupied Tonkin in late 1945. On March 28, 1944,



a "Provisional Republican Government of Vietnam" was proclaimed in Luichow, China, with Viet Minh officials occupying only a minority of positions in the government. 18/ But in Vietnam, the Viet Minh formed the only effective and extensive resistance movement.

(b) Collaborator Parties

Both the French and the Japanese sponsored Vietnamese political parties. On the whole, the Japanese enjoyed significantly greater success in manipulating the Vietnamese, and they thereby emasculated Decoux's colonial administration. Through direct support of the theocratic movements, such as the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, and a variety of nationalist political parties, they maintained the potential for popular dissidence in balance with available French force. As a result, large portions of Vietnamese territory, especially in Cochinchina, were vacated by the French to Vietnamese rule. Japanese sources reported during World War II that the more important of the collaborating Viet nationalists were in two groups: The Great Vietnam Nationalist Association (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Hoi) -- an outgrowth of rightist elements within the VNQDD; and the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) -- based on the nationalist groups which had been in exile in Japan. According to Japanese reports, in Annam and Tonkin, these included:

Great Vietnam Party (Dai Viet)

- (1) The Great Annam People's Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), which at its height -- about 1940 -- had about 25,000 members; but as a result of the pressure of the French authorities in Indochina, it is now somewhat reduced. Its members are chiefly from the lower classes, students or boy scouts, and its influence extends from the provinces of Ha Dong, Hai Duong, Bac Ninh and Central Annam to the Laos District.
- (2) The Great Annam Democratic Party, which was disbanded in 1941 as a result of official pressure but reformed in 1942 and consists chiefly of intellectuals and men of letters; its members number about 2,000. This was probably the section of the Vietnam Nationalist Party known as the Dai Viet Dan Chinh and directed by Nguyen Tuong Tam.
- (3) Three other groups whose total membership is two or three thousand. One of these smaller groups was probably the Youth Patriots (Thanh Nien Ai Quoc), led by Vo Xuan Cam, which has been described as a terrorist party that maintained a flow of violent anti-French propaganda. Another was the Servants of the Country (Phung Xa Quoc Gioi), directed by Pham Dinh Cuong.

Restoration League (Phuc Quoc)

- (1) The Annam National Party, consisting of a volunteer corps, a civilian section, and a military section. The volunteer corps,

which is the principal element, counts 1,500 in the north, 3,000 in the center, and 5,000 in the south and has influence amongst business men, officials, and intellectuals.

- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), made up of doctors, lawyers and intellectuals in the liberal professions and having latent power among young intellectuals.
- (3) The National Socialist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Xa), having about 2000 members and its chief sphere of influence in the light industry towns of Haiphong and Hanoi. This party was directed by Tran Trong Kim, late premier of the Bao Dai government, and is said to have been inspired by the Japanese Military Police and Intelligence Organization (Kempei Tai) to recruit Vietnamese for the puppet military forces. 19/

In Cochinchina, the Restoration League was preeminent:

#### Restoration League

- (1) The Vietnam National Independence Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Doc Lap Dang), founded by Tran Van An, Nguyen Van Sam, Ho Van Nga, and Ngo Tan Nhon. Some of the elements of the dissolved Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang), which had been founded in 1939, joined the new organization. The Party was markedly pro-Japanese in orientation. It favored collaboration with the Japanese Army and the adherence of Vietnam to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), a group of intellectuals and students.
- (3) The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), an outgrowth of the Cochinchina Vietnam Nationalist Party, consisting of pro-Japanese elements.
- (4) The Vietnam National Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Dang), a minor political group.
- (5) The Youth Justice Association (Thanh Nhlen Nghia Dong Doan), a minor youth group.
- (6) The Youth Patriots (Thanh Nhlen Ai Quoc), the southern branch of a terrorist youth group. Elements of this southern group created an organization known as the Vietnam Democratic Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Ngia Dang).
- (7) The Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect (Phat Giao Hoa Hao), also known as the Vietnam Independence Restoration Party (Viet Nam Doc Lap Van Dang), a militant Buddhist sect led by Huynh Phu So.



- (8) The Great Religion of the Third Amnesty (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do), a Cao-Daist sect led by Tran Quang Vinh, the principal subordinate of the Cao-Daist Pope, Pham Cong Tac. The Cao-Daists had been furnished arms by the Japanese and were used as an auxiliary police force throughout Cochinchina. 20/

Whatever short term advantages these groups gained vis-a-vis the Vichy French, however, collaboration with the Japanese had the longer run effect of discrediting a significant number of Vietnamese nationalists, putting their movements at particular disadvantage in postwar competition with the Viet Minh, which preserved its aura of unwavering faith to resistance against all foreign domination.

(c) Trotskyists

In Cochinchina radical communists survived, and as the war progressed, gained a following concentrated in Saigon. In 1944 the "October" Group announced the forming of the International Communist League, and in March, 1945, issued a manifesto condemning the "Stalinists" of the ICP who supported the Allies, and the "feudalist" collaborators with the Japanese:

"The future defeat of Japanese imperialism will set the Indochinese people on the road to national liberation. The bourgeoisie and feudalists who cravenly serve the Japanese rulers today, will serve equally the Allied imperialist states. The petty-bourgeois nationalists, by their aimless policy, will also be incapable of leading the people towards revolutionary victory. On the working class, which struggles independently under the flag of the Fourth International, will be able to accomplish the advance guard tasks of the revolution.

"The Stalinists of the Third International have already abandoned the working class to group themselves miserably with the 'democratic' imperialisms. They have betrayed the peasants and no longer speak of the agrarian question. If today they march with foreign capitalists, in the future, they will help the class of national exploiters to destroy the revolutionary people in the hours to come." 21/

The Trotskyite "Struggle" Group also re-emerged in May, 1945, to resume its rivalry with the "October" faction, but both parties advocated world revolution, a worker-peasant government, arming of the people and general expropriation of land and industry. Their principal significance was to debilitate the ICP in Cochinchina, and to impair the effectiveness of the Viet Minh there.

(4) Viet Minh Operations in Vietnam

The ICP, at the heart of the Viet Minh, communicated to the League the lessons it had painfully learned in the uprisings of

1930-31, and 1940-41: (1) however eager the people were to take up arms, insurrection had to be correctly timed in order to exploit both maximum confusion in enemy ranks and the fullest support from the non-committed; (2) little faith could be placed on defectors from enemy forces -- reliance had to rest rather "chiefly on the great masses of the people"; (3) bases for the support of operations had to be carefully prepared beforehand. 22/ According to its own histories, the ICP began in 1941 to prepare for a general uprising in Vietnam. In Cochinchina, up until April 1945, the ICP continued to operate largely underground and without much regard for the Viet Minh mantle; in Tonkin, however, all ICP undertakings were given Viet Minh identity. Throughout Vietnam, the ICP initiated patient political action: the dissemination of propaganda, the training of cadres, the establishment of a network of cells down to hamlet level. The Central Committee of the ICP adopted this four point program in 1941:

- "1. Develop new organizations among the people, and consolidate those which exist within the Viet Minh.
2. Expand organizations into the cities.
3. Organize the minority peoples within the Viet Minh.
4. Form small guerrilla groups." 23/

The Viet Minh assigned priority to political tasks ahead of military missions. Cadres were repeatedly impressed with the essentiality of a properly prepared political and material base for guerrilla warfare. Even where the latter was countenanced, they were enjoined to put "reliance on the masses, continual growth, extreme mobility, and constant adaptation." 24/ In the mountainous region of North Vietnam above Hanoi the first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942-1943. Then followed shadow government by Viet Minh agents, and in September, 1943, after the people had been well organized, the first locally recruited guerrilla forces were formed under Viet Minh auspices. Not until December 22, 1944, was the first unit of the Viet Minh Liberation Army created, but there is little evidence of concerted guerrilla operations until after March, 1945; by that time the underground organization was pervasive. As of the end of 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a membership of 500,000, of which 200,000 were in Tonkin, 150,000 in Annam, and 150,000 in Cochinchina. 25/ The aim was for each village to have a Viet Minh committee, responsive to a hierarchy of committees; in most instances where the village committee existed, it was in a position to challenge the government authority. According to Giap, by 1945 the Viet Minh was the de facto government in many areas:

"There were regions in which the whole masses took part in organizations of national salvation, and the village Viet Minh Committees had, as a matter of course, full prestige among the masses as an underground organization of the revolutionary power." 26/

On 9 March, 1945, the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Indochina, and set up the Emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, as the head of a state declared independent of France, but participating in the Greater East Asia



Co-Prosperity Sphere. This unification of Vietnam by the faltering Japanese under the ineffectual Annamese Emperor opened new political opportunity for the Viet Minh. On April 6, 1945, the ICP Central Committee directed the forming of a shadow government throughout Vietnam, to extend to every echelon of the society, prepared to mobilize the whole people for war. In May, 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border.

Whatever may be said for the distortion of the historical record by communist historians to magnify the importance of the Viet Minh, it is fact that the American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, for intelligence and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. 27/ It also seems clear that in terms of popular reputation in Vietnam, no Viet political movements save the ICP and the Viet Minh added to their stature for their wartime activities.

#### (5) The Liberation of North Vietnam

As the war drew to a close, the Viet Minh proved to be as adroit strategically as it had showed itself on the tactical level -- or, as Truong Chinh, the Secretary General of the ICP was careful to point out in 1946, the ICP proved to be adroit. According to Truong Chinh, on August 13, 1945, the Party, informed of Japan's collapse, decided to pre-empt Allied occupation of Vietnam, and hurriedly convened a Viet Minh congress that had been pending since June:

"During the historic Congress, the Indochinese Communist Party advocated an extremely clear policy: to lead the masses in insurrection in order to disarm the Japanese before the arrival of the allied forces in Indo-China; to wrest power from the Japanese and their puppet stooges and finally as the people's power, to welcome the allied forces coming to disarm the Japanese troops stationed in Indo-China." 28/

A possibly more accurate record -- since it jibes with other accounts and alludes to spontaneous local uprisings in advance of Party's "order for general revolution" -- was published by the DRV in September, 1946:

"These epoch-making developments prompted the Viet Minh Party to convene without further delay the National Congress. A revolutionary committee was crated and the general revolution was ordered on the night of August 13, immediately after the news of Japan's unconditional surrender.

"On August 16, the National Congress opened at Tan Trao, a locality in Thai Nhuyen province, in the liberated zones. Sixty representatives from all parts of the country came to learn additional details on the order for the General Revolution. The home and foreign policies of the Revolutionary

Government were mapped out and the Viet Nam people's Liberation Committee, which became later the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Democratic Republic, was created.

"At this historical gathering, the Viet Minh Party laid down a clear-cut program which bore on the following points:

- a) to disarm the Japs before the entry of Allied forces into Indochina;
- b) to wrest the power from the hands of the enemy;
- c) to be in a position of authority when receiving the Allied Forces.

"In some areas, the order for the general revolution was not received. Acting on their own initiative, members of the Viet Minh Front ordered a general mobilization and led the population into the fight for power. Thus, on August 11, our compatriots of Ha Tinh took up arms against the Japanese fascists while uprisings also took place at Quang Ngai.

"On August 14 and 15, our forces seized numerous enemy advanced positions in the vicinity of the liberated zones.

"On August 16, with the news of the Japanese capitulation, millions of people throughout the country rose up to the occasion and a general attack on Japanese barracks and military establishments began.

"On August 17-18, huge demonstrations took place in the capital city of Hanoi. The fight for power effectively started here, on the 19, with the local militia forces going over to the Revolutionists' side. Spearheaded by youth formations, the people's army under the command of the Viet Minh forced their way into the compounds of the Home Ministry Building. Governor Phan ke Toai had already fled with his closest collaborators. The Tran trong Kim puppet government promptly gave way while at the former capital of Annam, Emperor Bao Dai signed his act of abdication in the presence of representatives of the Viet Minh Central Headquarters.

"Thus, a new Power came into being, as the people's Revolutionary Government was officially proclaimed and was given the unqualified support of the entire population.

"A few days later, members of the National Liberation Committee met in session in Hanoi. In view of the changed situation, the New Power was re-organized and a provisional Government which included several non-party members was established with Ho Chi Minh as its president." 29/



Ho Chi Minh issued an "Appeal for General Insurrection" following the August 16 conference:

"...This is a great advance in the history of the struggle waged for nearly a century by our people for their liberation.

"This is a fact that enraptures our compatriots and fills me with great joy.

"However, we cannot consider this as good enough. Our struggle will be a long and hard one. Because the Japanese are defeated, we shall not be liberated overnight. We still have to make further efforts and carry on the struggle. Only a united struggle will bring us independence.

"The Viet Minh Front is at present the basis of the struggle and solidarity of our people. Join the Viet Minh Front, support it, make it greater and stronger!

"At present, the National Liberation Committee is, so to speak, in itself our provisional government. Unite around it and see to it that its policies and orders are carried out throughout the country!

"In this way, our Fatherland will certainly win independence and our people will certainly win freedom soon.

"The decisive hour in the destiny of our people has struck. Let us stand up with all our strength to free ourselves!

"Many oppressed peoples the world over are vying with each other in the march to win back their independence. We cannot allow ourselves to lag behind.

"Forward! Forward! Under the banner of the Viet Minh Front, move forward courageously!" 30/

The hapless Bao Dai -- the first Vietnamese to govern a nominally united, independent nation in nearly a century -- on August 18, 1945, dispatched to General de Gaulle of France the following poignant and prophetic message:

"I address myself to the people of France, to the country of my youth. I address myself as well to the nation's leader and liberator and I wish to speak as a friend rather than as Head of State.

"You have suffered too much during four deadly years not to understand that the Vietnamese people, who have a history of twenty centuries and an often glorious past, no longer wish,

can no longer support any foreign domination or foreign administration.

"You could understand even better if you were able to see what is happening here, if you were able to sense this desire for independence which has been smoldering in the bottom of all hearts, and which no human force can any longer hold back. Even if you were to arrive to re-establish a French administration here, it would no longer be obeyed; each village would be a nest of resistance, every former friend an enemy, and your officials and colonists themselves would ask to depart from this unbreathable atmosphere.

"I beg you to understand that the only way to safeguard French interests and the spiritual influence of France in Indochina is to recognize frankly the independence of Vietnam and to renounce any idea of re-establishing French sovereignty or administration here in whatever form it may be.

"You would be able to listen to us so easily and become our friends if you would stop aspiring to become our masters again.

"Making this appeal to the well recognized idealism of the French people and the great wisdom of their leader, we hope that peace and the joy which has rung for all the people of the world will be guaranteed equally to all people who live in Indochina, native as well as foreign." 31/

De Gaulle never replied; the message was in any event moot, because within a week Bao Dai formally ceded his powers to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and thereafter France was faced in North Vietnam not by the Francophile mandarin-king, but by Ho Chi Minh, the implacable professional revolutionary -- dedicated nationalist-communist.

#### (6) The Liberation of South Vietnam

The overturning of Japanese power in Cochinchina followed a separate course. Bao Dai's government had waited until August 14, 1945 to proclaim the incorporation of Cochinchina into a united Vietnam, but this move came much too late to have any impact. The first effective steps toward consolidating the disunited Vietnamese political groups in the South was undertaken by the Trotskyist "Struggle" faction and formerly collaborationist parties, who merged on August 14, 1945, to form a "United National Front" (Mat Tran Quoc Thong Nhut). Participants included the Cao Dai League, the Hoa Hao Sect, and the Buddhist League. The United National Front adopted the Trotskyist platform, and directed its energies principally against Bao Dai's representatives in Saigon. The Viet Minh seems to have delayed until 24 August to launch its program in Cochinchina, apparently moving at that time in response to the seizure of power by the Viet Minh in Annam and Tonkin. In the meantime, the ICP, led by Tran Van Giau, quietly seized



power. On 25 August 1945, the Viet Minh sponsored a meeting at which a government entitled "Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic" was formed. The Committee of the South, though dominated by Tran Van Giau and other members of the ICP, purported to represent both the Viet Minh and the United National Front, and to be the southern arm of Ho Chi Minh's Hanoi government. The United National Front was represented at the 25 August meeting, but formal negotiations for an alliance between the Viet Minh and the Front did not commence until 30 August. The following is purported to be a transcript of the proceedings of this meeting, following a report by Tran Van Giau as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the South:

"Huynh Phu So (Hoa Hao leader) - 'Will Mr. Giau let us know what groups formerly secretly collaborated with the Viet Minh, and later publicly participated in it?'

"Tran Van Giau - 'In Nambo (Cochinchina) during the underground stage, these were the parties in the Viet Minh Front: the Indochinese Communist Party, the New Vietnam Democratic Party (Tan Dan Chu Dang), the Youth for National Liberation (Than-Hien Cuu Quoc), the officials for National Liberation (Quan-Khan Cuu Quoc), the Vietnam National Party (Viet-Nam Quoc Gia Dang), and now the United National Front.'

"Tran Van Thach (Trotskyist ["Struggle"] leader) - 'When was the Executive Committee established and who chose it? Will Front policy be followed and will there be communication with the Front? And since this assembly is held today, would the Government act in line with the Assembly, or is this the only meeting to be held?'

"Tran Van Giau - 'Now, I will answer Mr. Thach. The establishment of the Executive Committee was not my sole decision. It was established some time ago in order to take over the government. The Executive Committee is only a temporary one, pending the national election. In the interim, no one is willing to take power or obey orders. Although Mr. Thach's questions was not fully explained, I can tell what is in his mind. He would like to ask why a man like himself did not have a position in the government. Isn't that so, Mr. Thach? I repeat that this Government is only a temporary one. Later on when we have the general elections, if he is capable, Mr. Thach needn't worry about not having a seat in the Government. As for the work of the parties, between you and me, we will meet again.'

"Huynh Van Phuong (Intellectual Group) - 'Due to the circumstances that now face us, the United National Front felt that there should not be two fronts in the country. For this reason,

the United National Front called all parties and groups to meet together and selected Phan Van Hum, as its representative, to negotiate with the Viet Minh in order to fuse the two fronts into one.

'After negotiating, Mr. Hum returned and reported that the Viet Minh has refused to dissolve into the United National Front. They state that the Viet Minh is already a consolidated front in the eyes of the nation and has fought against Japanese imperialism. Today, in order to unite our strength, the United National Front has to affiliate with the Viet Minh.

'Since the Viet Minh view point was sound, after hearing Mr. Hum's views, the United National Front affiliated with the Viet Minh...'

"Tran Van Giau - 'The Viet Minh does not wish to race for power. If a man is able, no one will stand in his way. The United National Front represents many parties and groups which are affiliated to the Viet Minh...' " 32/

Although the 30 August meeting produced no formal merger, on 7 September 1946 the Viet Minh was able to announce the forming of a "national bloc committee" with the United National Front. It was Tran Van Giau's Committee of the South which was the de facto government in Saigon when the British occupation forces arrived.



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2. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam

a. Establishment of the Republic

On 26 August in a ceremony at Hue, the Emperor Bao Dai relinquished his power to Ho Chi Minh's representatives. He spoke of "mighty democratic forces in the north of Our Realm," and of apprehension that "conflict between the North and the South should be inevitable." To avoid such conflict, and to deny an invader opportunities to capitalize on internal struggle, he would assume the status of "free citizen of an independent country." Bao Dai called upon "all parties and groups, all classes of society as well as the Royal Family to strengthen and support unreservedly the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in order to consolidate our national independence." 33/ Bao Dai adopted the name Vinh Thuy, and accepted the title of "Supreme Political Adviser" to Ho Chi Minh's government.

On 2 September 1945 -- the day Japan signed the surrender instrument -- Ho proclaimed the foundation of a new state, issuing the following "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam":

"All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

"This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.

"The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states: 'All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights.'

"Those are undeniable truths.

"Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

"In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

"They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center, and the South of Viet-Nam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united.

"They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood.

"They have fettered public opinion; they have practiced obscurantism against our people.

"To weaken our race they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

"In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people and devastated our land.

"They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of bank notes and the export trade.

"They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.



"They have hampered the prospering of our national bourgeoisie; they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

"In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them.

"Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that, from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri Province to the North of Viet-Nam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation. On March 9 [1945], the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered, showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

"On several occasions before March 9, the Viet Minh League urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the Viet Minh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

"Notwithstanding all this, our fellow citizens have always manifested toward the French a tolerant and humane attitude. Even after the Japanese Putsch of March, 1945, the Viet Minh League helped many Frenchmen to cross the frontier, rescued some of them from Japanese jails, and protected French lives and property.

"From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.

"After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam.

"The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.

"The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for dozens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic.

"For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligation that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Viet-Nam, and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland.

"The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country.

"We are convinced that the Allied nations, which at Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet-Nam.

"A people who have courageously opposed French domination for more than eighty years, a people who have fought side by side with the Allies against the fascists during these last years, such a people must be free and independent.

"For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country -- and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty." 34/

b. Short-lived Independence in Cochinchina

September 2, 1945, found South Vietnam in profound political disorder. The successive collapse of French, then Japanese power, followed by the dissension among the political factions in Saigon had been accompanied by widespread violence in the countryside. The Cao Dai set up a state at Tay Ninh; the Hoa Hao established a capital in Can Tho; jacquerie flared, and a number of rural officials and landlords were murdered. On September 2, violence in Saigon took the lives of a French priest on the threshold of the Cathedral, several other French, and a number of Vietnamese; French homes were sacked, and an atmosphere of fear-ridden tension descended upon the city.

On 12 September 1945, the first British troops arrived in Saigon -- a Gurkha battalion; they were accompanied by a company of Free French soldiers. General Douglas D. Gracey, commanding, arrived on 13 September. Prior to his departure from India, Gracey had announced that:

"The question of the government of Indochina is exclusively French. Civil and military control by the French is only a matter of weeks." 35/



It appears that Gracey's instructions from the Allied Command in Southeast Asia explicitly limited his mission to the disarming of the Japanese, and certainly did not require him to undertake revision of the Vietnamese political system. 36/ But in fact, General Gracey used his troops and his position to overturn the Committee of the South. Neither communism nor Viet nationalism seems to have concerned the British commander. On 10 September, the Viet Minh had accepted a reorganization of the Committee of the South in which Tran Van Giau was replaced as Chairman by Phan Van Bach, a prominent independent nationalist, and ICP members occupied only four of thirteen Committee seats. Gracey apparently regarded the Vietnamese government with disdain, if not contempt, not because of its political complexion, but because of its lack of authority from the French, and because of the civil disorder over which it presided. The British commander ordered the Japanese to assist in maintaining order, and directed the disarming of Vietnamese; both directives were ignored, but added to the mounting tension.

The attitude of the occupation forces reinforced the position of the Trotskyites who had denounced the Viet Minh, the ICP, and the Committee of the South as a "bourgeois-democratic government, even though the communists are now in power," and decried any attempts to cooperate with the Allies. The Trotskyite International Communist League called for the arming of the people, and incited the populace against the British. Beginning on 12 September, the Vietnamese police in Saigon launched a violent campaign to suppress the Trotskyites, in which many Trotskyite leaders were killed. In the rural areas, fighting broke out between Viet Minh troops and the forces of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. The spreading intra-Viet violence rendered futile further attempts to draw together the Vietnamese factions, and heightened apprehension among Westerners in Saigon.

On 17 September 1945, the Committee of the South called a general strike to protest the Allied lack of cooperation, and arrested some sixteen French. The French then importuned Gracey to permit them to step in to restore order. On 19 September, the French "Commissioner" for Cochinchina, Cedile, announced that there would be no negotiations with Vietnamese nationalists until civil order was restored. On 20 September, General Gracey suspended all Vietnamese newspapers, and took over the Vietnamese police force. On 21 September, martial law was declared, outlawing all demonstrations, and the bearing by Vietnamese of any weapon whatsoever, including bamboo rods. On 22 September, the British freed some 1400 French parachutists that had been incarcerated outside Saigon by the Japanese, and these promptly descended on the city to beat Vietnamese wherever they could lay their hands on them. On the morning of 23 September, French troops occupied the police stations, the post office, and other public buildings, and began to arrest Vietnamese politicians and public officials, although members of the Committee of the South escaped. The official British account noted that:

"It was indeed unfortunate that the manner in which this coup d'etat was executed together with the behavior of the

French citizens during the morning of Sunday, 23 September, absolutely ensured that countermeasures would be taken by the Annamites [Vietnamese]. The more emotional of the French citizens, who, after all, had suffered considerably at the hands of the Annamites during the past few months, unfortunately took this opportunity of taking what reprisals they could. Annamites were arrested for no other reason than that they were Annamites; their treatment after arrest, though not actively brutal, was unnecessarily violent." 37/

The following day, the Vietnamese struck back: the economic life of Saigon was paralyzed by strikes, and that night groups of Vietnamese -- principally a gangster sect called the Binh Xuyen -- began a series of attacks on municipal utilities. On 25 September, in an assault through a French residential district, over one hundred Westerners were killed, and others carried off as hostages; on 26 September, the U.S. commander of the O.S.S. in Cochinchina was killed. Thus, the Indochina War began in Cochinchina in late September, 1945, and American blood was shed in its opening hours.

The Committee of the South issued a statement deploring the British actions:

"Suppression of the press, which was unanimously defending the independence of Vietnam, prevented us...from controlling and directing public opinion at a time when the mob was already exasperated by provocations of the French...The British Army, to accomplish its mission of disarming the Japanese forces, had no need to disarm our police force and suppress our government as it did. Yet we have demonstrated by our actions that our government is most cordial in its desire to lend every possible assistance to the British Army in the accomplishment of its task." 38/

At that juncture, the ICP in Cochinchina was in a particularly vulnerable position. The ICP -- the core of the Viet Minh -- had permitted the Independence League to pose as the arm of the Allies, and had supported cooperation with the British and amnesty for the French. The Party had even undertaken, through the Committee of the South, to repress the Trotskyites. It was apparent that advocacy of political moderation, public order, and negotiations with the French -- by the ICP, by the Viet Minh, or by the Committee of the South -- was quite futile. Further, the ICP was apparently assured by French communists that they would receive no assistance from Party brethren abroad. An American correspondent in Saigon was shown a document dated 25 September 1945, which:

"...advised the Annamite [Vietnamese] Communists to be sure, before they acted too rashly, that their struggle 'meets the requirements of Soviet policy.' It warned that any 'premature adventures' in Annamite independence might 'not be in line with



Soviet perspectives.' These perspectives might well include France as a firm ally of the USSR in Europe, in which case the Annamite independence movement would be an embarrassment. Therefore, it urged upon the Annamite comrades a policy of 'patience.' It advised them in particular to wait upon the results of the French elections, coming up the following month, in October, when additional Communist strength might assure the Annamites a better settlement. In the meantime, it baldly proposed that an emissary be sent not only to contact the French Communist Party but also the Russians 'in order to acquaint yourselves with the perspectives of coming event.'" 39/

Whether the circumstances were propitious or not, conflict had been thrust upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists there was how to respond, and apparently the Party leadership determined that violence was the sole recourse, and that to regain leadership of the nationalist movement they had to make the Viet Minh the foremost proponent of war, the most unbending foe of compromise with the French. General Gracey, on the urgings of Admiral Lord Mountbatten's Allied Command, made a determined effort to effect a compromise with the Viet Minh, and succeeded in obtaining a truce on 2 October. But this broke down quickly in the face of truculence on both sides. French reinforcements under General Leclerc began pouring into Saigon, bolstering French resolve. A representative from Ho's Hanoi government arrived to buttress the Viet Minh's position with tales of Viet Minh ascendancy in Annam and Tonkin. The French sought to negotiate on the premise that they would rule, and allow some Viet participation; the Viet Minh demanded return to the status quo prior to 22 September, and eventual French evacuation. On October 9, 1945, France and the U.K. concluded an agreement in London in which the British formally recognized the French civil administration in Indochina as the sole legitimate authority south of the sixteenth parallel. Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin described to the House of Commons of Vietnamese disorder and looting, and of the difficulties presented by clashes between French troops under Gracey's command and Vietnamese forces. Britain, he announced, would assist in transporting to Vietnam enough French troops to permit them to take over from Gracey, and that in the interim British policy would support "close and friendly cooperation between the British and French commanders." 40/ On 11 October, the truce broke down, and fighting resumed. On 25 October, the French under General Leclerc thrust southward from Saigon to My Tho, the temporary capital of the Committee of the South, and, victorious there, to the northwest into Tay Ninh, where they subdued the Cao Dai. The Viet Minh opened a guerrilla campaign which greatly slowed the French, and demonstrated almost at once that neither French air power nor armor would suffice for pacification against that determined foe. The eminent French journalist, Philippe Devillers, who accompanied Leclerc's initial forays, wrote that:

"From this time on the work of pacifying the country revealed an aspect it would never lose again: to be forever put in question. The Viet Minh would suddenly start shooting at night at a village protected by one of our posts...to pull

defenders to one side while on the other set fire to the houses and killed all suspicious persons. If we departed, believing a region pacified, they would arrive on our heels and the terror would start again. There was only one possible defense: to multiply the posts, to fortify them, to arm the villagers, and to train them for a coordinated and enlightened self-defense through a thorough job of information and policing.

"But this required men and weapons. What was needed was not 35,000 men (of which Leclerc was then disposed) but 100,000, and Cochinchina was not the only problem." 41/

c. Nationalist Government in North Vietnam, 1945-1946

(1) The Government of 2 September 1945

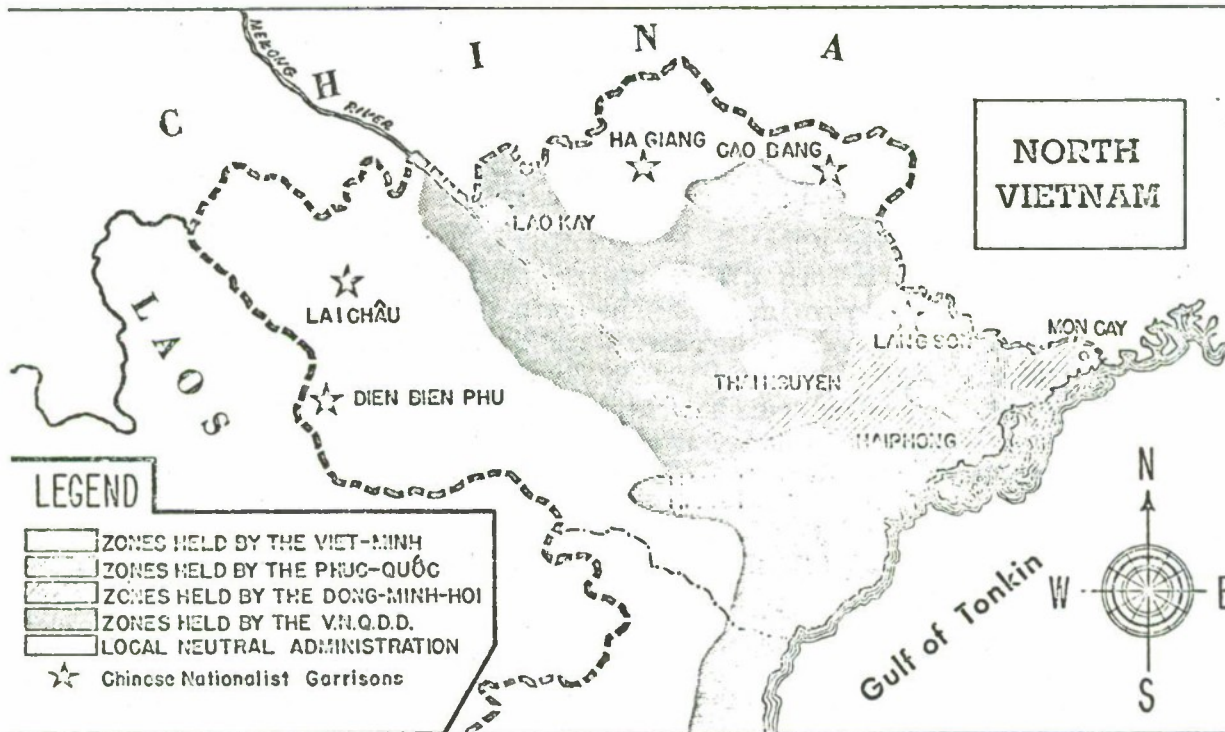
The salient problem other than Cochinchina facing the French in the fall of 1945 was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Hanoi government of Ho Chi Minh claimed dominion over all of Vietnam, but as far as French challenge to its authority was concerned, ruled in fact only in Annam and Tonkin. The DRV was neither wholly Viet Minh nor communist composition. Despite the vigor and initiative of the Viet Minh, the salient political fact of life in North Vietnam was Chinese Nationalist army of occupation, and the Chinese presence had forced Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh to accommodate Chinese-backed Viet Nationalists, and defer to Chinese policy in other respects.

The numbers of Chinese who entered North Vietnam is not known precisely, the totals having been obscured not only by inadequate reports, but by the Nationalists' use of Tonkin for passage of troops from Yunnan and Kwangsi en route to other parts of China. French estimates ran as high as 180,000, but the Chinese occupation forces per se probably numbered about 50,000. 42/ Even fewer foreign troops would have gravely overburdened North Vietnam, where because of a bad crop year, and war-disturbed commerce, famine was rampant. Most of the Chinese troops were ill-disciplined and poorly-equipped, living, perforce, off the land. Their exactions of the peasantry stirred the traditional animosities of the Vietnamese for the Chinese -- resentments untempered by gratitude to the Chinese as liberators, since the Vietnamese believed they had already been liberated by the Viet Minh. And the transgressions of the Chinese troops were matched by the Chinese high command; the warlords promptly began to plunder North Vietnam. The Chinese dollar was made legal tender at an exorbitant rate of exchange with the Vietnamese piastre, which exacerbated an already serious inflation, and opened new vistas for the black market. Chinese profiteers began large scale buying of French and Vietnamese enterprises and real estate. 43/

As the Chinese forces marched into North Vietnam, they ousted local Viet Minh governments, and replaced them with VNQDD, and Dong Minh Hoi groups; Phuc-Quoc (Restoration League) groups seized power elsewhere.



Backed by Chinese troops, and drawing on Chinese funds, the VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi opened newspapers, and launched a political campaign against the Viet Minh and the DRV government. The resultant situation in North Vietnam in autumn, 1945, is depicted in Figure 4.



Map of the political situation in North Vietnam in September-October 1945.

Source: Cooper, Killigrew, and LaCharite',  
Case Studies in Insurgency and  
Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam  
1941-1954 (Washington: SORO, 1964).

FIGURE 4

The realities of the Chinese presence alone required Ho Chi Minh to use circumspection in dealing with rival nationalist groups. Why the Chinese did not follow through, and simply oust Ho's government in favor of a VNQDD/Dong Minh Hoi coalition is not known. It appears that venality played a part -- Chiang Fa Kuei and other warlords were direct beneficiaries of an official DRV "gold week" in September, 1945, in which the state appealed to the citizenry for scraps of gold as "a contribution to the finance of national defense." 44/ Allegedly this campaign produced some 800 pounds of gold and 20 million piastres, and for it the DRV received from the warlords, besides toleration, weapons the Japanese had in their possession -- a reported 40,000 arms, including mortars, artillery pieces, and 18 tanks. 45/

But Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were constrained to go well beyond bribery. In setting up the government of 2 September 1945, they had been carefully to include non-Viet Minh politicians, and to hold ICP representation to 6 to 16 cabinet seats. On 23 October, the Viet Minh signed a pact with a dissident faction of the Dong Minh Hoi, purportedly in the interest of the "common struggle against the aggressive attempts of the colonial French, in order to defend the liberty and independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." 46/ But other elements of the Dong Minh Hoi and the VNQDD persisted in their attack on the Viet Minh, making a particular point of communist domination.

Ho Chi Minh and the ICP then decided on a drastic move. Following a three day ICP conclave of 9 to 11 November, 1945, the ICP leadership issued the following declaration:

"1. Whereas, in consideration of the given historical situation, both internationally and internally, the present moment is precisely an exceptional occasion for Viet Nam to reconquer her unitary independence;

"2. Whereas, in order to complete the Party's task in this immense movement of the Vietnamese people's emancipation, a national union conceived without distinction of class and parties is an indispensable factor;

"3. Wishing to prove that the communists, in so far as they are advance guard militants of the Vietnamese people, are always ready to make the greatest sacrifices for national liberation, are always disposed to put the interest of the country above that of classes, and to give up the interests of the Party to serve those of the Vietnamese people;

"4. In order to destroy all misunderstandings, domestic and foreign, which can hinder the liberation of our country, the Central Executive Committee of the Indochina Communist Party in meeting assembled on November 11, 1945, has decided to voluntarily dissolve the Indochina Communist Party.



"Those followers of communism desirous of continuing their theoretical studies will affiliate with the Indochina Association of Marxist Studies.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE INDOCHINA COMMUNIST PARTY

November 11, 1945"

47/

The dissolution of the ICP was opposed by Tran Van Giau and others from Cochinchina, where the ICP rather than the Viet Minh, as such, had constituted the primary political organization among the people, but Ho's views prevailed.

Evidently Ho was also compelled by the opposition's constant demands for representation in the government to schedule national elections for January, 1946. However, fearful of Viet Minh control of the polls, and respectful of its popular strength, the VIQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi on 23 December, 1945, negotiated with the Viet Minh an agreement to seat, irrespective of the vote, 50 VIQDD and 20 Dong Minh Hoi delegates among some 300-360 members of the National Assembly. 48/ The elections were held as scheduled, openly in Tonkin and Annam, and clandestinely in Cochinchina.

The chief of the American O.S.S. group in Hanoi from 22 August to 12 December, 1945, in a debriefing in the Department of State on 30 January 1946, described the political situation in North Vietnam as follows:

"General Gallagher pointed out that little love was lost between the Chinese and the French; that the presence of the American group in Hanoi restrained anti-French Chinese action; and that he himself had influenced General Lu Han (Commanding General of Chinese armed forces in Indochina) to bring Sainteny and Ho Chi Minh together and confront both with a strong directive that order must be maintained. The existence of a vacuum in the north with neither French nor Chinese troops present would be extremely dangerous, for the Annamese would react strongly against all French in the area, who would be helpless in protecting themselves. To take over successfully, the French would need a sufficient force to cover the whole north. One or two modern French divisions could, in General Gallagher's opinion, defeat the Annamese.

"In response to the question whether the French could do more than take key cities, he admitted that the Annamese would take to the hills and continue guerrilla warfare. Even in Saigon, he pointed out, things are far from peaceful despite British and French claims to the contrary. Establishment of French control could be speeded up if they were able to make large-scale air drops throughout the north. The Annamese, however, are well organized and, so far as small arms go, are quite well armed, although they have no navy, shore batteries and probably little artillery.

"The question was raised whether the French mission in Hanoi was in fact negotiating with Ho Chi Minh. General Gallagher replied that the Viet Minh Provisional Government was at first willing to negotiate; then in October, after de Gaulle's pronouncements on colonial policy, the Annamese refused to negotiate with the French and reacted vigorously against all French nationals in Hanoi. The Chinese may succeed in putting in a less anti-French Annamese government so that negotiation might go forward. All French efforts to stimulate a palace revolution against Ho were of no avail. Ho himself will not deal with the French. The Viet Minh is strong and, regardless of possible superficial changes in the Provisional Government, Ho will be behind any continuing Annamese movement. General Gallagher said that Sainteny had told him he expected peaceful agreement between the French and the Annamese would be reached by negotiation.

"General Gallagher was asked how effective the Viet Minh administration would be with neither French nor Chinese forces present. He replied that on the whole he was impressed by the remarkably effective Annamese administration. There was an able personnel; they were all enthusiastic and young, but there were too few of them. Whatever their technical skill, they perhaps lack executive ability and experience since the technical services in Hanoi were at first very well run but gradually deteriorated. Trained people for the government and at the municipal level are lacking. In General Gallagher's opinion the Annamese are not yet ready for self-government and in full-fledged competition with other nations they would 'lose their shirts.' However, the demand for independence is widespread and even in the villages the peasants refer to the example of the Philippines.

"Ho is willing to cooperate with Great Britain, USSR, or the United States and would perhaps even settle for French tutelage if that were subordinated to control by the other nations. French control alone, however, will be strongly resisted. The deep-seated hatred for the French has been fanned by exceedingly clever Viet Minh propaganda.

"General Gallagher was asked whether the Annamese were realistic regarding their ability to stand up against French military force. While they are too enthusiastic and too naive, he said, they probably know that they will be licked. They are strong on parades and reiterate their willingness 'to fight to the last man,' but they would be slaughtered and they have been told that and probably know it. The Annamese would be no match for forces with modern arms even if they themselves have some, which they may have since the Chinese found no Japanese rolling artillery and numerous Japanese anti-aircraft guns seem to have completely disappeared. United States Army representatives never did learn the extent of arms controlled by the Viet Minh. Certainly the Chinese are not turning Japanese arms over to them. Before V-J Day the Japanese undoubtedly had



armed and trained many Annamese. A Japanese general claimed they had taken over on March 9 simply because the French could no longer control the Annamese, but this statement General Gallagher characterized as a lie. He had heard that under the pretext of arming Annamese gendarmes for police duty in Hanoi, the Japanese had actually armed three distinct contingents, dismissing each group when armed and bringing in a new one to be armed and trained. Furthermore, the Annamese had acquired Japanese arms from arsenals which had been opened. General Gallagher did not know whether or not Tai Li (Deputy Director, Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, Chinese National Commission of Military Affairs) was sending arms to the Viet Minh.

"General Gallagher was asked whether the presence of French hostages in the north would restrain French forces when they enter the region. He pointed out that only a few French civilians had been removed by air. All the rest, besides some five thousand disarmed French troops, were still to be removed. The Chinese cannot take them out nor would Lu Han even permit their evacuation to the Do Son Peninsula. Their presence had been a constant restraining influence on Sainteny. Asked whether the Annamese would let these French be evacuated, General Gallagher replied that they would have to if the Chinese were still there, but that these French nationals would be a real problem if the Chinese were moved out. The American Army group had to exert considerable pressure on the Chinese to get them to give any freedom at all to French civilians in Haiphong, Hue and other centers besides Hanoi. However, the Chinese and French alone had arranged for shipments of food from the south. The American group, incidentally, had to intervene to prevent the monopoly by the French of such food or of food distributed by the U.S. Army. The French nationals could be evacuated from Hongai and Tourane by the United States when the Japanese were removed if the Chinese would concentrate them at those ports. However, General Gallagher noted, that would place us in a position of working against the Annamese.

"Originally, General Gallagher explained, the French expected the United States to play the same role in the north that the British were playing in the south. When they found us neutral they became more and more antagonistic and did everything possible to persuade United States personnel to favor the French position. They had no appreciation of the actual help which the American group gave to the prisoners of war and some of the civilian French in the form of food, medical aid, and so on. The Annamese, too, expected American help originally, having been thoroughly indoctrinated with the Atlantic Charter and other ideological pronouncements. In our neutral role we were thus a disappointment to both sides....

"At the present time the Hanoi radio is controlled by the Chinese so that there is communication between Hanoi and Saigon. A British

military and civilian liaison team was sent to Hanoi and a Chinese counterpart to Saigon. The British in Hanoi at first made little progress with the Chinese but General Gallagher understands they have since made more headway.

"The Chinese 60th Army in the south of the Chinese zone and the 93rd Army around Hanoi, both totalling some 50 thousand men, have been told to concentrate for removal to Manchuria, but whether they have actually moved out or not General Gallagher does not know. By December, however, the Chinese 53rd Army had begun to come in from Yunnan and would probably provide replacements for the other two Armies.

"General Gallagher noted that magnetic mines have not been entirely cleared at least from the northern ports and that the threat provided by these mines has helped and would continue to help keep the French from undertaking large-scale landing operations in that area. He felt that regular rail communications between Saigon and Hanoi might not be opened for another year." \*

In early 1946, Ho Chi Minh attempted to bring Ngo Dinh Diem into his government, but Diem, whose brother, Ngo Dinh Khoi, had been killed by the Viet Minh, refused. In February, attacks on Ho from both the communist left and the non-Viet Minh nationalists reached such intensity that Ho reportedly proposed his own resignation, and the forming of a state under Bao Dai. <sup>49/</sup> The Bao Dai substitution, Ho felt, would not only mollify his internal foes, but improve the DRV's position with the Americans and French: to the U.S. Ho had sent a series of unanswered appeals for internationalizing Vietnam; and with the French, Ho had opened talks trending toward a French-protected, French-recognized, independent DRV.

## (2) The Government of 2 March 1946

The National Assembly "elected in January met on 2 March 1946, and approved the new DRV government at its opening session. Its top echelon of 12 contained only 2 ICP members, but 3 V/QDD and 1 Dong Minh Hoi; Ho remained President, but his Vice President was the leader of the Dong Minh Hoi, and the key portfolios of Interior and Defense went to neutrals.

The new government faced at the outset a crisis in relations with France. Though General Leclerc's "pacification" operations in South Vietnam had fallen short of expectations, French troops and shipping had arrived in Indochina in sufficient quantity for them to contemplate operations in North Vietnam. Simultaneously, the French undertook negotiations with the Chinese, seeking to have them relinquish their occupation of North Vietnam, and with the DRV, seeking to have it accept the reintroduction

\* Reproduced from Memorandum of Conversation by Mr. Richard L. Sharp, of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, Department of State, dated January 30, 1946.



of French forces. In the meantime, the British withdrew from Cochinchina; on 4 March 1946, the Allied Southeast Asia Command deactivated Indochina as a territory within its purview. In February, the French deployed an amphibious task force prepared for operations in North Vietnam. On 28 February, they obtained Chinese agreement (from Chungking, not the Chinese satraps in North Vietnam) to turn over the occupation to France by April. Ho Chi Minh, faced with French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from the United Nations or the U.S., had no recourse save to negotiate with the French.

The Accord signed by Ho with the French on 6 March, 1946, taxed Ho's popularity to the utmost. The VNQDD had vehemently opposed compromise, and even negotiations with the French, but Ho was careful to bring opposition representatives into his talks with Sainteny, the French spokesman, and to see to it that the March 6 Accord was signed not only by Ho and Sainteny, but also by Vu Kong Khanh, the leader of the VNQDD. Still, feeling ran high against the French, and it took all of Ho's prestige to prevent rebellion against the Viet Minh. On 7 March, Ho and Vo Nguyen Giap defended the Accord before a crowd of 100,000 in Hanoi, in which Ho assured his people that: "You know that I would rather die than sell our country." 50/ On 8 March French troops landed in Haiphong, and re-entered Hanoi ten days later.

Upon French return -- Ho's coalition cabinet and Vu Kong Khanh's signature on the March 6 Accord notwithstanding -- a number of VNQDD leaders withdrew their support of Ho's government in protest against what they termed a "pro-French" policy of the Viet Minh. The Emperor Bao Dai left the country on 18 March, the day the French entered Hanoi. Ho, thereupon, moved to merge the Viet Minh into a larger, more embracing Front organization, which would consolidate the several parties of the DRV, and thereby ease political stress. On 27 May 1946, the formation of the Popular National Front (Lien Hiep Quoc Dan Viet Nam) -- subsequently known as the Lien Viet -- was announced, to bring about "independence and democracy." Prominent leaders of all political parties were among the founders, and they jointly pledged "to safeguard our autonomy, so as to later attain complete independence." 51/ The Viet Minh, VNQDD, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party were all roofed under the Lien Viet, but maintained separate organizations.

### (3) Chinese Withdrawal

Agreement among the several parties in the Lien Viet lived, however, only so long as the Chinese remained in North Vietnam. Despite Chungking's contract to withdraw by April, 1946, the warlords lingered at their looting into June. On June 10, 1946, Chinese Nationalist troops evacuated Hanoi, and on June 15, the last detachments embarked at Haiphong. On June 19, the official Lien Viet organ Qui Quoc published a sharp rebuke of "reactionary saboteurs of the March agreement," pointedly directed at the VNQDD. Reaffirming a policy of cooperation with France,

the Vietnamese government invited the French to join in a campaign against "enemies of the peace." The French, recognizing in the Lien Viet their sole Vietnamese support, willingly acceded.

One of the more remarkable chapters in the tragic history of Vietnamese nationalism then ensued. On the heels of the withdrawing Chinese, Vo Nguyen Giap's DRV troops struck into the regions governed by the Dong Minh Hoi, VNQDD, and Phuc Quoc. In a series of skirmishes, they routed the partisan bands, and overturned the civil administrations of the opposition parties. The French not only provided equipment, but in some instances actually maneuvered their own forces with, and furnished artillery support for, the Vietnamese. Some strongholds held out for months -- Lao Kay on the Yunnan border remained in VNQDD hands until November, 1946 -- but the issue was decided before the end of July. 52/

On July 11 to 13, in a series of raids in Hanoi, DRV forces with French armor in support occupied the opposition party headquarters and printing plants, and arrested over 100 political figures. With that, most of the opposition leaders returned to exile in China whence they had come less than a year before. Among these were Nguyen Hai Than of the Dong Minh Hoi -- Ho's Vice President -- and Vu Khong Khanh and Nguyen Tuong of the VNQDD -- the former one of the three signatories of the March 6 Accord, the latter Ho's Minister of foreign Affairs and one of the negotiators of the Accord.

The U.S. Vice Consul in Hanoi submitted the following report to the Department of State concerning the political situation at that juncture:

"Please pass to General Marshall for information.

"There are three important political parties in Viet Nam.

"They are Viet Minh League, composed of former Indo-Chinese Communist Party (PCI dissolved itself November 30, 1945) and Democratic Party, son [sic] Vietnam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi, generally referred to as Dong Minh Hoi or DMH; and Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang.

"There are in addition several splinter parties which seem to serve chiefly as vehicles for organized banditry.

"Both Dong Minh Hoi and Quoc Dan Dang seem have support of Chinese. Most active part of Viet Minh is factor composed of former PCI members.

"Viet Minh strength seems to be spread throughout northern



Indo-China. Dong Minh Hoi and Quoc Dan Dang control territory in Moncay, Langson, Vinh Yen area.

"As yet no Catholic party has appeared nor do Catholics appear to be committed to support of any one party. Viet Minh League has been making tentative moves to capture Catholic support but is said to be too radical to obtain full cooperation from church. In view of fact church claims million members in Tonking and Annam (large percentage believed to be 'rice Christians'), it seems probable that Catholics as group will [not?] remain long absent from politics." \*

In July, the same source reported that Viet Minh was steadily eliminating the Dong Minh Hoi and VNQDD as organized opposition. \*\*

Ho Chi Minh was absent from Vietnam during the summer and early fall of 1946, engaged first by the abortive Fontainebleau negotiations and then by their aftermath, the modus vivendi he signed with France on 14 September 1946. During Ho's absence, Vo Nguyen Giap -- Acting Minister of the Interior and Minister of National Defense -- policed the Vietnamese political battlefield, arranging for the VNQDD and other "opposition" parties to survive -- suitably disarmed and manned with cooperative nationalists -- within the Lien Viet. The Lien Viet proceeded to forge new "unity" within the Front, and to tighten Front control over the DRV. On Ho's return, the National Assembly was called back into session, presented with a reorganized government and a new constitution.

#### (4) The Government of 3 November 1946

The National Assembly elected in January, 1946 -- in dubiously honest elections -- convened in Hanoi in late October. Of the original membership, 291 delegates presented themselves. The composition at opening was as follows:

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\* Telegram, Hanoi 20 to State, 20 May 1946

\*\* Telegram, Hanoi 69 to State, 26 July 1946.

. DRV  
Political Parties in the DRV National Assembly    53/  
October 28, 1946

Independents	90
Democratic	45
Socialist	24
Marxist	15
Lien Viet	80
Dong Minh Hoi	17
VNQDD	20
	<u>291</u>

The VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi, allocated 50 and 20 seats respectively, were thus less than 50% represented, and the Marxists group, the smallest in the Assembly, was, according to all surviving evidence, the most active and influential. During the two weeks the Assembly was in session, a number of opposition members were arrested and charged with criminal offenses. When the Assembly closed, 20 Dong Minh Hoi and VNQDD members remained, and of these, only 2 registered dissenting votes.

The new constitution, ratified on 8 November 1946 by the National Assembly with a vote of 240 to 2, ordained in phrases reminiscent of Jefferson and Rousseau a state of guaranteed civic freedoms, of delineated duties and rights of citizens, and of a people's parliament supreme in power. Thereafter, the Assembly adjourned until late 1953, and never did get around to transforming itself into constitutionally prescribed form. 54/ The 1946 Constitution declared Vietnam to be a democratic republic in which all power belonged to the people "without distinction of race, class, creed, wealth, or sex." Its territory, "composed of Bac-Bo, or Northern Viet Nam (Tonkin), Trung-Bo or Central Viet Nam (Annam), and Nam-Bo or Southern Viet Nam (Cochinchina) is one and indivisible... The capital of Viet Nam is Hanoi." 55/ However, the Constitution of 1946 never became institutionalized; instead, the exigencies of the war with the French eventuated in a government which was literally an administrative extension of a rigidly disciplined politico-military apparatus headed by Ho Chi Minh, and a cadre of his old comrades from the Indochina Communist Party. 56/

The government approved by the National Assembly on 3 November 1946, however, preserved some of the facade of coalition; although the key cabinet positions were filled by communists, the government included independents, democrats, socialists and even one nominal VNQDD. Figure 5 presents the several Vietnamese governments in the period 1945-1949. Ho Chi Minh throughout that period preserved coalition, at least pro forma; the DRV government in 1949 was still composed of a minority of ICP members and included one VNQDD and one Dong Minh Hoi. (The chart ignores the Lien Viet, using the more familiar Viet Minh throughout; the Vietnamese Nationalist Party is the VNQDD.)



VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENTS 1945 - 1949

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
State of Vietnam	10 March 1945	HUE	Not Available	Prime Minister	Tran Trong Kim	Conservative Nationalist

[ Bao Dai, Emperor, abdicated on 26 August 1945 in favor of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam ]

People's Liberation Committee	16 August 1945	Hanoi	12 Viet Minh (6 ICP) 2 VN Democratic Party	Not Available		
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[ Superseded by Prov Gov't LNV, 2 September 1945 ]

Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic	25 August 1945	Saigon	6 Viet Minh (4 ICP) 1 VN Democratic Party 2 Non-party 1 National Independence Party	Chairman	Tran Van Giu	ICP
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[ Overthrown by French Coup d'etat 23 September 1945 ]

Provisional Gov't of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 Sep 1945	Hanoi	9 Viet Minh (6 ICP) 4 VN Democratic Party 1 Catholic 2 Non-Party	President Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister of Interior Minister of Propaganda Minister of National Defense Minister of Youth Minister of National Economy Minister of Social Welfare Minister of Justice Minister of Health Minister of Public Works & Communications Minister of Labor Minister of Finance Minister of National Education Minister without Portfolio Minister without Portfolio	Ho Chi Minh Ho Chi Minh Vo Nguyen Giap Tran Huy Lieu Chu Van Tan Duong Duc Hien Nguyen Manh Ha Nguyen Van To Vu Trong Khanh Pham Ngoc Thach Do Trong Kim Le Van Hien Pham Van Dong Vu Dinh Hoc Cu Huy Can Nguyen Van Xuan	Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Viet Minh Democrat Catholic Non-party Democrat Viet Minh Non-party Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Democrat Viet Minh Democrat
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[ Superseded by Gov't LNV, 2 March 1946 ]

Government of South Vietnam	14 Feb 1946	Saigon	4 French 8 Vietnamese	Consultative Council of Cochinchina		
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Vietnamese Government 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 March 1946	Hanoi	2 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice President	Nguyen hai Than	Dong Minh Hoi
			3 VN Nationalist	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nguyen tuong Tam	Vietnam Nationalist Party
				Minister of Interior	Buynh thuc Khang	Independent
				Minister of National Defense	Phan Anh	Socialist
				Minister of National Economy	Cau ba Huong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			1 Dong Minh Hoi	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoo	Democrat
			2 Democrats	Minister of Education	Lang thai Mai	Viet Minh *
				Minister of Agriculture	Do xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi**
			1 Socialists	Minister of Social Welfare	Truong dinh Tri	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			3 Independents	Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Public Works & Communications	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat

\* The post of Minister of National Education was held only temporarily by Lang thai Mai for Cao van Thinh (Independent).  
 \*\* Do xuan Luat became Vice Minister of Agriculture and Buynh thien Loc (Independent) assumed the Ministry.

The Vice Ministries were divided as follows:

Vice Minister of Interior	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Dau	Independent
Vice Minister of Justice	Nguyen van Huong	Independent
Vice minister of Public Works & Communications	Dang phuc Thong	Viet Minh
Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh Van Binh	Independent
Vice Minister of National Education	Do duc Duc	Democrat
Vice Minister of Agriculture	Do xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Do Tiep	Dong Minh Hoi
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nghiem ko To	Vietnam Nationalist Party

In addition, the following were elected: (1) a Consultative High Council headed by Nguyen vinh Thuy (ex-emperor Bai Dai); (2) A supreme council of National Defense with Vo Nguyen Giap (Communist) as president and Vu khong Khanh (Nationalist Party) as vice-president; (3) the President of the National Assembly, Ngo tu Ha (Catholic); (4) the permanent Committee of the Assembly headed by Bui bang Doan (Independent)

[Reorganized under constitution adopted by National Assembly, November 1946]

Republic of Cochinchina	1 June 1946	Saigon	All French Appointees	President	Nguyen van Thinh	Democratic
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<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	3 Nov 1946	Hanoi	5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice-President	Vacant*	
				Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
			5 Independents	Minister of Interior	Huynh thuc Khang	Independent
				Minister of National Defense	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of National Economy	Vacant*	
			2 Democrat	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoc	Democrat
			1 Socialist	Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
			1 Nationalist	Minister of National Education	Nguyen van Huyen	Socialist
			2 Vacant	Minister of Agriculture	Ngo tan Haon	Independent
				Minister of Communications & Public Works	Tran Lang Khoa	Democrat
				Minister of Labor	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Health	Hoang tinh Tri	Independent
				Minister of Social Welfare	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
				Minister without Portfolio	Nguyen Van To	Independent
				Minister without Portfolio	Bo xuan Lam	Independent
				Supreme Councillor	Nguyen vinh Thuy (Lo Lai)	
				Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
				Vice Minister of Interior	Hoang huu Lam	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Huu	Independent
				Vice Minister of National Economy	Phan van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice Minister of Agriculture	Cu huy Can	Democrat
				Vice Minister of Justice	Tran cong Quang	Democrat
				Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh van Minh	Independent
				Vice Minister of National Education	Nguyen Khanh Toan	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice Minister of Communication & Public Works	Dang phue Thong	Socialist
				Vice Minister of Health	Vacant***	
				Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant	

\* Phan ngoc Thach (Viet Minh) apparently acted as assistant to Ho chi Minh in the cabinet. The Vice-president was not filled until July 1949, when Phan van Dong (Communist-Viet Minh) was given the post.  
 \*\* Phan Anh (Socialist) was appointed Minister of National Economy on January 26, 1947.  
 \*\*\* Nguyen Binh Chi (Independent) was appointed to the Vice Ministry of Health.

Vietnam Government 1945 - 1949 (Cont'd)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Cont'd)				Vice Minister of Health	Ton that Tung	Independent
				Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of War Veterans and Invalids	Ngo tu Ba	Independent (Catholic)
Provisional Government of South Vietnam	13 Oct 1947	Saigon		French-sponsored regime Nguyen Van Xuan, President		
Administrative Committee of Tonkin	May 1947	Hanoi		French-sponsored regime		
Administrative Committee of Annam	May 1947	Hue		French-sponsored regime		
Provisional Vietnam Central Government	6 June 1948	Hanoi		Nguyen Van Xuan, President		
Government of Vietnam	1 July 1949	Saigon		Emperor Bao Dai, Head of State		



Vietnamese Government 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam			5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
			5 Independent	Vice President	Pham van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
			2 Democrat	Minister of	Hoang dinh Giam	Socialist
			3 Socialist	Foreign Affairs		
			1 Nationalist	Minister of	Phan ke Toai	Independent
			1 Dong Minh Hoi	Interior		
				Minister of	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
				National		
				Defence		
				Minister of	Phan Anh	Socialist
				National		
				Economy		
				Minister of	Vu dinh Hoc	Democrat
				Justice		
				Minister of	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
				Finance		
				Minister of	Nguyen van Ruyen	Socialist
				National		
				Education		
				Minister of	Nga tan Khon	Independent
				Agriculture		
				Minister of	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
				Communications & Public Works		
				Minister of	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
				Labor		
				Minister of	Hoang tinh Tri	Independent
				Health		
				Minister of	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
				Social Welfare		
				Minister of	Vu dinh Tung	Independent (Catholic)
				War Veterans & Invalids		
				Minister with- out Portfolio	Bo xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
				Minister with- out Portfolio	Dang van Huong	Independent (Buddhist)
				Vice Ministers were divided as follows:		
				Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of Interior	Tran Quy Hung	Independent
				Vice Minister of National Defence	Tu quang Bau	Independent
				Vice Minister of National Economy	Cu huy Can	Democrat
				Vice Minister of Agriculture	Nghiem xuan Yen	Independent
				Vice Minister of Justice	Tran cong Tuong	Democrat
				Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh van Binh	Independent
				Vice Minister of National Education	Nguyen Khanh Toan	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice Minister of Communication & Public Works	Dang phuo Thong	Socialist

As of July 1949

### 3. Nationalism During the Franco-Viet Minh War

Both the DRV constitution and the government of November, 1946, were soon submerged as the Viet Minh geared for war with France. A series of armed incidents in November, followed by large scale fighting in Hanoi in late December, destroyed what was left of the Franco-Viet modus vivendi. The DRV government took to the hills to assume a status of shadow state. The Viet Minh -- properly, the Lien Viet -- transformed itself into a semi-covert resistance organization, and committed itself to the military defeat of the French. During the opening year of the war, 1947, the DRV took steps to enhance its coalition nature, and to broaden the appeal of the Viet Minh. Communists, including Vo Nguyen Giap, were removed from the cabinet, and prominent Catholics and independents added. Thereafter, the government shifted steadily leftward. In the summer of 1948, Giap was reappointed Minister of National Defense, and a year later, Pham Van Dong, top communist, became Vice President. Moreover, while at first resistance against the French was offered by disparate political groups, eventually the Viet Minh, by superior organization and leadership, recaptured their monopoly over revolutionary nationalism.

Following is a survey of the principal Vietnamese political movements in the period 1947-1950. Two main groupings existed: the communist-centered Viet Minh and its auxiliaries in resistance to the French, and those nationalists finding common cause in the restoration of Bao Dai.



Vietnamese Political Movements, 1947-1950

<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>The Resistance Groups</u>	
<u>Viet Minh (or Lien Viet)</u> <u>(Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi)</u>	Only political apparatus which extended throughout Vietnam and Vietnamese society. Drew on World War II reputation, but created new doctrine for political and military action. Leadership effective, and capitalized well on Ho's prestige as pre-eminent nationalist. Formally merged with the Lien Viet in March, 1949.
<u>Communist Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Cong San Dang)</u>	Ostensibly dissolved, but evidently functioning as the core of the Viet Minh. CIA estimates membership grew over the years as follows:  1931: 1500      1946: 50,000      1950: 400,000  Party adhered strictly to "popular front" line, remaining covert, and working through the Viet Minh.
<u>Vietnam Democratic Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Dan Chu Dang)</u>	A small, middle class, largely Tonkinese group within the Viet Minh, loyal to Ho Chi Minh, and solid supporters of the DRV government.
<u>Vietnam Socialist Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Xa Hoi Dang)</u>	A Hanoi-echo of European Social-Democratic parties, narrowly based and small in numbers; created in 1946 within the Viet Minh, and a consistent supporter of the DRV government.
<u>Vietnam Nationalist Party</u> <u>(VNQDD)</u>	A small, uninfluential faction of the VNQDD, operating within the Viet Minh.
<u>Vietnam Revolutionary League</u> <u>(Dong Minh Hoi)</u>	A second splinter group of little political power.

Resistance Groups (Continued)Trotskyist Movement

A Saigon centered, left-wing communist faction opposed to the French and to the Viet Minh alike. Principal significance was its continued impairment of communist effectiveness in Cochinchina.

The Bao Dai Restoration MovementsNational Union Front

(Mat Tran Thong Nhut Quoc  
Gia Lien Hiep)

Formed in Nanking in February, 1947, by VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi leaders; gained support of Tran Trong Kim (Bao Dai's premier in the March-August 1945 government), Nguyen Hai Than (Ho's onetime Dong Minh Hoi Vice President), and Nguyen Tuong Tam (VNQDD, sometime Foreign Minister of the DRV). Claimed to unite the VNQDD, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Cao Dai, and the Buddhists behind Bao Dai, but splintered with withdrawal of sect supporters, and under impact of French political maneuvers.

Vietnam Revolutionary League  
(Dong Minh Hoi)

Re-established in China in 1946, but never again influential in Vietnam; probably numbered 5,000 or less. When war broke out, sought reconciliation with Viet Minh, but was rebuffed. Swung to Bao Dai, although supporting a hard line with the French.

Vietnam Nationalist Party  
(VNQDD)

Enjoyed prestige of tradition dating to 1930's, but fortunes waned with Chiang Kai-shek's, with whom it had associated itself closely. Probably numbered 5,000 or less, and influence within Vietnam largely confined to Hanoi, and to northern Tonkin, in Viet Minh heartland. Support for Bao Dai highly tentative and heavily conditioned.



PARTY or FACTION	DESCRIPTION
<u>The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)</u>	
<u>Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Dan Chu Xa Hoi Dang)</u>	A Cochinchinese faction which splintered from the Viet Minh over quarrels with Viet Minh leaders. Included Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen leaders, and participated in the National Union Front. Party fractured in November, 1947, over dispute with Hoa Hao, and thereafter became defunct.
<u>Popular Movement</u> <u>(Doan The Dan Chung)</u>	A Hanoi-centered anti-DRV Tonkinese movement which acquired no widespread following, and by 1949 seemed to have fallen apart.
<u>Vietnam Nationalist Youth Alliance</u> <u>(Viet Nam Quoc Gia Thanh Nien Doan)</u>	Another small Tonkinese movement which was of little significance.
<u>Cao Dai League</u> <u>(Doan The Cao Dai)</u>	Headed by Phan Cong Tac, the Cao Dai Pope (in 1946 returned by the French from exile in Madagascar). The League claimed 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 adherents in Cochinchina and maintained (with some French aid) armed forces. Clashes between the Cao Dai and Viet Minh troops were frequent within the regions governed by the Cao Dai. The Cao Dai were divided on the issue of French support, since xenophobia was common within the sect. In January, 1948, the Cao Dai signed a peace with the Hoa Hao, and pledged support for Bao Dai. Phan Cong Tac openly aligned himself with the Bao Dai government in July, 1949. Nonetheless, the sect remained religiously, rather than politically oriented, and harbored a wide range of political opinion. The principal commitment remained Cao Daism.
<u>Hoa Hao</u> <u>(Phat Giao Hoa Hao)</u>	Another Cochinchinese armed sect with a following of 200,000 to 1,000,000. During World War II the sect, with Japanese support,

PARTY or FACTION

DESCRIPTION

The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)

Hoa Hao (Continued)  
(Phat Giao Hoa Hao)

preached an anti-foreigner creed, and in 1945 joined the anti-French, anti-British resistance. In 1947, Huynh Phu So, the sect's leader, was executed by the Viet Minh, which led to the defection of the Hoa Hao from the resistance, and the sect's support of Bao Dai's restoration. Relations with the French, and with rival Vietnamese factions, remained strained.

Buddhist Group  
(Tinh Do Cu Si)

A movement centered chiefly on the overseas Chinese community, and advocated passive resistance to the Viet Minh.

Vietnam Catholic League  
(Viet Nam Lien Doan  
Cong Giao)

Organized by and around the Catholic clergy, the League exercised varying degrees of influence over some 2,000,000 Catholics, chiefly in Annam. The League supported the DRV in 1945 and 1946, and approved struggle for Vietnam's independence. Ngo Dinh Diem led the League into the National Union Front, but the League split with the Front over the desire of the majority to back the resistance, and the repugnance of the remainder, including Diem, at Bao Dai's inability to break France's control over Vietnam.

Binh Xuyen  
(Lien Khu Binh Xuyen)

A Saigon-sited gangster apparatus which originally fought as allies of the Viet Minh, but -- like the Hoa Hao -- were disaffected by the Viet Minh's shooting of several of their leaders. Provided tepid support for Bao Dai, and remained wary of the French.

Vietnam National Rally  
(Viet Nam Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)

An outgrowth of the National Union Front formed in December, 1947, in Hanoi, the Rally attempted to merge the various pro-Bao Dai parties in Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. Such success as it enjoyed was a matter of form rather than substance, and its influence was quite limited.



PARTY or FACTION

DESCRIPTION

The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)

Vietnam Restoration League  
(Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong  
Minh Hoi)

Revived in 1947, the descendant of Japanese-oriented nationalist groups, the Phuc Quoc, under Prince Cuong De, at first attempted to offer an alternative to both the Viet Minh and Bao Dai. In June, 1947, and May, 1948, Prince Cuong De vainly solicited aid from the President of the United States against the French, and urged reconciliation between Ho Chi Minh and Bao Dai. The party remained chiefly in exile, and was unable to exert any appreciable influence over events in Vietnam.

French Sponsored Movements

With French encouragement, a number of Vietnamese parties were formed to give body to the several governments established by the French. These included the Indochinese Democratic Party, the Cochinese Democratic Party, the Popular Front of Indochina, and the Popular Movement of Cochinchina. In general, these parties supported the French policies of maintaining Cochinchina separate from Annam and Tonkin, and of strong ties with France. Eventually, such minimal popular support as they commanded was thrown behind the "Bao Dai solution."

The foregoing demonstrates the poverty of Vietnamese nationalist movements in the period 1946-1950; only the Viet Minh can be said to have been a "national" movement at the outset of the war with France, and it built its popularity throughout the years of struggle. The Viet Minh stressed the primacy of political action among the people and the careful preparation of bases as preconditions for military action. Their careful attention to the former included extraordinary efforts to inculcate in their troops attitudes and habits which would win the respect, and eventually the cooperation of the populace. The following extracts from Viet Minh doctrine are dated 1948:

#### "TWELVE RECOMMENDATIONS

"The nation has its root in the people.

"In the Resistance war and national reconstruction, the main force lies in the people. Therefore, all the people in the army, administration, and mass organizations who are in contact or live with the people, must remember and carry out the following recommendations:

"Six forbiddances:

- 1 - Not to do what is likely to damage the land and crops or spoil the houses and belongings of the people.
- 2 - Not to insist on buying or borrowing what the people are not willing to sell or lend.
- 3 - Not to bring living hens into mountainous people's houses.
- 4 - Never to break our word.
- 5 - Not to give offense to people's faith and customs (such as to lie down before the altar, to raise feet over the hearth, to play music in the house, etc.)
- 6 - Not to do or speak what is likely to make people believe that we hold them in contempt.

"Six permissibles:

- 1 - To help the people in their daily work (harvesting, fetching firewood, carrying water, sewing, etc.)
- 2 - Whenever possible to buy commodities for those who live far from markets (knife, salt, needle, thread, pen, paper, etc.)
- 3 - In spare time, to tell amusing, simple, and short stories useful to the Resistance, but not to betray secrets.



4 - To teach the population the national script and elementary hygiene.

5 - To study the customs of each region so as to be acquainted with them in order to create an atmosphere of sympathy first, then gradually to explain to the people to abate their superstitions.

6 - To show to the people that you are correct, diligent, and disciplined."

#### "STIMULATING POEM

The above-mentioned twelve recommendations  
Are feasible to all.

He who loves his country,  
Will never forget them.  
When the people have a habit,  
All are like one man,  
With good army men and good people,  
Everything will be crowned with success.  
Only when the root is firm, can the tree live long,  
And victory is built with the people as foundations.

April 5, 1948" 57/

Appraisals of Vietnamese nationalist parties available to the U.S. Department of State in 1949, on the eve of U.S. involvement in the Indochina war, were, on the whole, perceptive. A paper submitted in February, 1949, by George M. Abbott, one of the few American diplomats who had talked with Ho face to face, summarized issues in the following terms:

#### "C. International Relations.

1. United States - Post war relations between the United States and Indochina got off to a bad start with President Roosevelt's views on international trusteeship for strategic areas in the hands of powers unable to defend them, followed by the overenthusiastic activities of certain OSS agents in the period just before and after the Japanese surrender. The belief that the policy of the United States is to throw the French out of Indochina still persists in many circles both in Indochina and in France. We are also blamed for permitting the Chinese and English to occupy the northern and southern halves of the country to disarm Japanese troops. Our persistent refusal to supply equipment and arms for French military operations in Indochina is a sore subject with most French army officers. Another source of irritation has been the almost universal tendency of American correspondents visiting Indochina to write articles extremely critical of the French...

"In recent weeks the French have actively supported proposals for four power cooperation in Southeast Asia to prevent the spread of communism, and there has been much talk about the strategic importance of Indochina as a bastion against the southward spread of Chinese Communists.

"As far as the Annamites are concerned, they were encouraged to believe that after the defeat of Japan we would assist them in obtaining independence. As it became apparent that our sympathies were tempered by strategic considerations in Europe, the popularity of the United States has diminished. Nevertheless, the prestige of the United States is still high, and even Ho Chi Minh has been careful to prevent any public anti-American propaganda....

"No one knows how many communists there are in Indochina, but the number of real party members is certainly small. The highest estimate is 20% of the troops fighting with Ho Chi Minh and this includes sympathizers. However, the number is undoubtedly growing, and at the same time non-communist military units are being steadily infiltrated with secret agents. Units under communist command are generally better armed. Thus the problem for the leader contemplating changing sides is not an easy one.

"Another point on which definite information is lacking is the channel of communications with Moscow and the center of regional control...Certainly satisfactory communications exist since Moscow publications of fairly recent date are frequently seized by the French...

"One peculiar thing about Vietnam Communism is that there has been very little anti-American propaganda. It is obvious that this is not due to ignorance of the current party line. It apparently represents a hope on the part of Ho Chi Minh that he may still obtain American support for or at least acceptance of a Viet Minh government under his leadership. Evidence that this hope is diminishing is furnished in a regional party directive dated in November 1948 which stated that active anti-American propaganda should be conducted in party circles and by word of mouth among the people but should not yet appear on the radio, in the press, or in public speeches...

"Opposed to the French forces are about 75,000 Vietnamese troops of various political complexions, largely under communist dominated leadership. There is considerable French-furnished evidence of communist political commissars and indoctrination extending down to company strength levels. It is certain that the disciplined communist element has been the largest factor



in maintaining the vigor and cohesiveness of the resistance. In this, they have been greatly helped by French indecision and bad faith, and the terrorism of French troops.

"In spite of arms captures and occasional defections, there is no sign of large scale weakening of Vietnamese resistance abilities or morale. The large areas under Vietnamese control lack luxuries and medicines, but are wholly self-sufficient in the basic necessities and tolerably well administered, according to what few reports are available. They continue to form a source of supplies and of fresh troops that are only limited in numbers by the arms available.

"Although there are rumors of a Chinese Communist treaty with Ho Chi Minh, and of a Chinese Communist general and his staff in Northern Tonkin, there is little evidence, as yet, that the Chinese are of any considerable help in the resistance. French sources feel that there is little danger of a Chinese Communist 5th column in Cochinchina, or of an invitation on the part of Ho Chi Minh to the troops of the age-old national enemy to enter Indochina in force, in spite of the communist link. All French military sources consulted, however, feel that a large scale Chinese Communist invasion would make most, if not all, of Tonkin, militarily untenable.

"For many months past, observers feel that the resistance has not put forth its maximum effort, perhaps because the leaders are waiting for the outcome of political negotiations going on between the High Commissariat, the French Government and the Xuan-Bao Dai elements. If these should break down, the resistance will be greatly strengthened by the adhesion of many now neutral or pro-French elements. If the negotiations are successful, the resistance army is sure to be a dominant factor in any form of Vietnamese self-government..." 58/

An extensive State Department intelligence report on "Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists" 59/ of October, 1949, highlighted the importance of the Viet Minh:

"The Viet Minh. The Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), or Viet Minh, is the most influential political organization within the Vietnam Government [DRV]. It is the only political group whose organization extends down to the smallest villages. Its members include both individuals and parties, i.e., the Vietnam Socialist Party, the Vietnam Democratic Party, etc. As a League, it groups together a wide coalition of political personalities from moderate nationalists to doctrinaire communists. It most closely resembles the Chinese Kuomintang

during the period 1924-26, when the communists and Chang Kai-shek collaborated in China's nationalist movement.

"The Viet Minh Executive Committee, or Tongbo, is the real repository of power in Vietnam territory. The influential government paper, National Salvation (Cuu Quoc), is the organ of the Tongbo and reflects the line of the government. A majority of the Tongbo members are believed to be former members of the dissolved Indochinese Communist Party. Within the mass nationalist movement, the communists are undoubtedly the most cohesive political factor. President Ho Chi Minh is a communist but has great prestige as a nationalist leader among the mass of Vietnamese. He is the outstanding political personality in Indochina. He plays down his past communist connections, emphasizes the nationalistic aspects of his program, and is popularly considered a man above parties.

"The Viet Minh exercises its control over the mass nationalist movement through a variety of 'national welfare' organizations of women, youth, peasants, soldiers, etc., which in their totality embrace most of the population of Vietnam. Hoang Quoc Viet, the General Secretary of the Viet Minh, claims that the organization has a total membership of nine million..."

The collapse of the Chinese nationalists in 1949 reverberated within the Vietnamese nationalist movements. The Kuomintang-oriented parties -- principally the VNQDD -- were severely discredited, and the exile movements in China dispersed. The DRV began to shift into the communist bloc in search of material support, and there was a concomitant further leftward movement within the Viet Minh. By 1951, the Communist Party was "legalized." The Lao Dong Party (Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam, or Vietnamese Workers' Party) thereafter became the dominant political power within the DRV. The Lao Dong Party was expressly Marxist-Leninist, and proudly claimed an unbroken lineage to the Indochinese Communist Party founded by Ho Chi Minh, including leadership of all the major nationalist "front" movements through 1951. Vo Nguyen Giap explained in 1961 that:

"The Vietnamese people's war of liberation was victorious because we had a wide and firm National United Front...organized and led by the Party of the working class: the Indochinese Communist Party, now the Viet Nam Workers' [Lao Dong] Party. In the light of the principles of Marxism-Leninism...the Party found a correct solution to the problems..." 60/

The Lao Dong Party official history has credited communist machination for the key developments in Vietnamese history through 1951:





"The policy of founding the Indochinese democratic front between 1936 and 1939, the Viet Minh front between 1941 and 1951, and the Lien Viet front [1946-1951]; the decision of signing the 6 March 1946...preliminary accord [Ho's accommodation with France]... -- all these are typical examples of the clever application of the...instruction of Lenin." 61/

In 1951, Ho Chi Minh himself set forth a Leninist account of the origins of the Viet Minh and its role in the forming of the DRV and the war against France. In February, 1951, addressing the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), Ho explained his political maneuvers over the previous decades. Reviewing the history of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, he pointed out that Vietnam, too, had felt the stirrings of change, and the Vietnamese working class "...began to struggle and needed a vanguard team, a general staff to lead it. On January 6, 1930, our Party came into being..." He described how the Party had brought about the formation of the Viet Minh, and the foundation of the DRV. Then in 1945 the French colonialists reappeared in South Vietnam and Chinese-sponsored reactionary government seemed in prospect in North Vietnam:

"In the face of that grave and pressing situation, our Party did everything possible to keep itself in existence, to work and develop to give discreet and more effective leadership in order to have the time gradually to consolidate the forces of the People's power and to strengthen the National United Front.

"At that time, the Party could not hesitate: Hesitation meant failure. The Party had to make quick decisions and to take measures -- painful ones -- to save the situation. The greatest worry was about the Party's proclamation of dissolution. But in reality it went underground. And though underground, the Party continued to lead the administration and the people...

"Mention should be made of the [agreements with the French in 1946] because they were considered as ultrarightist and caused much grumbling. But in the opinion of our comrades and compatriots in the South, they were correct. Indeed they were, because our comrades and compatriots cleverly availed themselves of the opportunity to build up and develop their forces.

"Lenin said that even if a compromise with bandits was advantageous to the revolution, he would do it..." 62/

Ho then went on to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the resistance against the French, to describe the world situation in terms of a monolithic bloc of "democratic" nations against which was arrayed the United States and other reactionary powers, and to depict, as part of that larger clash,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



Vietnam's war in common with Laotians and Cambodians against the French and the United States. He called for "a legal party appropriate to the situation in the world and at home in order to lead our people's struggle to victory. This party is the Vietnam Worker's Party [Lao Dong]. As regards its composition...it will admit the most enthusiastic and most enlightened workers, peasants, and intellectuals. As regards theory, it adheres to Marxism-Leninism. As regards discipline, it has an iron discipline..."

Thus ended the Viet Minh as a non-communist nationalist coalition.

SUMMARY

Among the more cogent critiques of U.S. policy toward Vietnam is the contention that the U.S. failed to recognize in Ho Chi Minh a potential Asian "Tito." This view holds that Ho has always been more concerned with Vietnam's independence and sovereign viability than with following the interests and dictates of Moscow and Peking. With U.S. support, the argument runs, Ho would have adopted some form of neutrality in the East-West conflict and maintained the DRV as a natural and durable bulwark against Chinese expansion southward. Thus, were it not for "U.S. communist blinders," Ho would have served the larger purposes of American policy in Asia. Though the focus of inquiry in this study is the period immediately following World War II, when it would have been relatively easy to support an anti-Japanese, anti-colonial Ho, it is often argued that the U.S. neglected another opportunity after the Geneva Conference of 1954 -- and indeed, that U.S. acceptance of Ho, and a communist dominated Vietnam, may be the only path to peace in Southeast Asia today. The historical (1945-1954) argument has a persuasive ring. In the light of the present costs and repercussions of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, any prior way out can seem attractive. It is possible, however, that a dynamic and unified communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh could have been vigorously expansionist, thus causing unanticipated difficult problems in some ways comparable to current ones.

Many authors have advanced one version or another of the "Tito" hypothesis. Some develop the principal thesis that a different U.S. policy could have moved Ho to non-alignment and opposition to Peking; others stress the corollary that Ho was forced into dependence upon Peking and Moscow by American opposition or indifference. Whether Ho was a nationalist or a communist is not at issue; all of the authors quoted seem to accept that Ho was a communist, and that a communist Vietnam would probably have eventuated under his leadership. Rather, their arguments center on what they perceive to be Ho's willingness to subordinate communist goals, forms, and international discipline to attaining Vietnam's independence and unity. A few openly favor a communist Vietnam on the grounds that only a national communism led by Ho would be sufficiently strong to survive adjacent to China. They stress Ho's attempts in 1945 and 1946 to obtain Western backing, and point out that antipathy to China is a pillar of Viet nationalism. Many concede that the Tito analogy is not wholly appropriate. Unlike Tito, Ho came to power after the war without the aid of another communist state. More basically, there was no analogy to be made until late 1948, when the experiment with Tito seemed like it would work.



Nonetheless, these authors point out that if the U.S. found it advantageous to set aside its repugnance to Tito's communism in the interest of stemming Russian expansion in Europe, it should have been willing to accommodate Ho Chi Minh's communism for similar ends in Asia. This critique generally ends with the accusation that the U.S. purpose in Southeast Asia is simply and solely to stop communism. (Tab 1)

An examination of Ho Chi Minh's political development through 1950 may provide a basis to narrow the range of speculation concerning Ho and U.S. policy. From such a review, it is evident that the man who in 1945 became President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was a mature, extraordinarily dedicated revolutionary who had undergone severe hardships serving the cause of Vietnam's freedom from France. Fifty-five years of age in 1945, he had been a communist for twenty-five years -- one of the founding members of the French Communist Party -- and a Comintern agent in Asia for fifteen years before World War II. He was originally of Nghe-An, a province traditionally a spawning ground of revolutionists; of a father imprisoned by the French for nationalist activism; and of a Hue school known for radical nationalism among its students. Exiled from Vietnam from 1910 to 1940, imprisoned in Hong Kong and in China, deprived of home, family, fame, fortune and companionship outside the Comintern's conspiratorial circles, he apparently devoted himself selflessly all those years to revolution in Vietnam. Ruth Fischer, a well-known German former communist who knew Ho during this period, has written, "It was Ho Chi Minh's nationalism which impressed us European Communists born and bred in a rather grey kind of abstract internationalism."

For Ho, now back in Asia, World War II opened new avenues to the attainment of his life-long goals. France discredited itself in Vietnam through Vichy's collaboration with the Japanese, and then in 1945 was toppled from power altogether by Japanese arms. In the meantime, Ho had built the Viet Minh into the only Vietnam-wide political organization capable of effective resistance to either the Japanese or the French. Ho was the only Vietnamese wartime leader with a national following, and he assured himself wider fealty among the Vietnamese people when in August-September, 1945, he overthrew the Japanese, obtained the abdication of Bao Dai, established the DRV, and staged receptions for incoming allied occupation forces -- in which the DRV acted as the incumbent Vietnamese government. For a few weeks in September 1945, Vietnam was -- for the first and only time in its modern history -- free of foreign domination, and united from north to south under Ho Chi Minh.

Ho became the focus of the nationalist fervor evoked by these and subsequent events. Leaders of the rival Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VINQDD) and the Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), although admitted to the DRV government, commanded no grass-roots organizations, and since they were closely associated with the Chinese Nationalists, shared in



full measure in the anti-Chinese odium among the people of North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, French intrigue, and Vietnamese disunity precluded the emergence of a competitor to Ho. When France resorted to force to restore its control over Vietnam, Ho again became the head of Viet resistance, and the Viet Minh became the primary nationalist protagonists. Hence, Ho Chi Minh, both on his own merits and out of lack of competition, became the personification of Vietnamese nationalism.

Ho, nonetheless, found himself, his movement, and his government under intense pressure. From within the nation, the Chinese-backed Viet parties attacked communist domination of his government. For the sake of national unity, Ho dissolved the Communist Party, avoided communist cant, announced general elections, and assured the contending factions representation in the government well out of proportion to their popular support. External pressures from France and from China proved more difficult. The French capitalized on the relative weakness of the Viet Minh in South Vietnam, and the dissension among the Vietnamese there to overthrow the DRV government in Saigon, and to force the Viet Minh to resort to guerrilla warfare. In famine-wracked North Vietnam, Chinese hordes under booty-minded warlords descended on the DRV, supplanting its local government with committees of their own sponsoring and systematically looting. Ho vainly sought aid abroad; not even the Soviet Union proved helpful. Ho eventually (March, 1946) negotiated with the French, accepting a French military presence in North Vietnam for a period of five years in return for vague French assurances to the DRV as a "Free State within the French Union." When Ho was attacked for this by the pro-Chinese elements within the DRV, he declared:

"You fools! Don't you realize what it means if the Chinese stay? Don't you remember your history? The last time the Chinese came, they stayed one thousand years!

"The French are foreigners. They are weak. Colonialism is dying out. Nothing will be able to withstand world pressure for independence. They may stay for a while, but they will have to go because the white man is finished in Asia. But if the Chinese stay now, they will never leave.

"As for me, I prefer to smell French shit for five years, rather than Chinese shit for the rest of my life."

The unresolved historic problem, of course, is to what extent Ho's nationalist goals over-rode his communist convictions in these maneuvers. Ho seemed to place the former above the latter not solely as a matter of dissemblance, as he might have done in the dissolution of the Party and the simultaneous formation of a "Marxist Association," but possibly as a result of doubts about communism as a political form suitable for Vietnam. Bao Dai is reputed to have said that: "I saw Ho Chi Minh suffer. He was fighting a battle within himself. Ho had his own struggle. He realized communism was not best for his country, but it was



too late. Ultimately, he could not overcome his allegiance to communism." During negotiations for a modus vivendi with the French in Paris in autumn, 1946, Ho appealed to the French to "save him from the extremists" within the Viet Minh by some meaningful concession to Vietnamese independence, and he told the U.S. Ambassador that he was not a communist. He is reputed to have asserted at that time that Vietnam was not ready for communism, and described himself as a Marxist. In reply to a journalist's inquiry, Ho claimed that he could remain neutral, "like Switzerland" in the developing world power struggle between communism and the West. But these and other such statements could have come either from a proper Leninist or a dedicated nationalist. Ho's statements and actions after 1949, and his eventual close alignment with the Sino-Soviet Bloc, support the Leninist construction. But, then, U.S. insistence on Ho's being a doctrinaire communist may have been a self-fulfilling prophesy. (Tab 2)

There remains, however, the matter of Ho's direct appeals for U.S. intervention in Vietnam, at which even a Leninist might have scrupled. These occurred (late 1945, early 1946) just after France has reasserted itself militarily in South Vietnam, while Chinese Nationalist warlords were ensconced in Hanoi, and before the 6 March 1946 Accord with France. Desperately, Ho turned to the United States, among other powers, asking for "immediate interference" in Vietnam.

There were, at least, eight communications from Ho to the President of the United States, or to the Secretary of State, from October, 1945, to February, 1946. Ho had conveyed earlier, in August and September, 1945, via O.S.S. channels, proposals that Vietnam be accorded "the same status as the Philippines," for an undetermined period of tutelage preliminary to independence. With the outbreak of hostilities in South Vietnam, September-October 1945, he added formal requests for U.S. and U.N. intervention against French aggression, citing the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and a foreign policy address of President Truman in October, 1945, endorsing national self-determination. Ho's last direct communication with the U.S. was in September, 1946, when he visited the U.S. Ambassador in Paris to ask vaguely for U.S. assistance in obtaining independence for Vietnam within the French Union.

There is no record of U.S. reply to any of Ho's appeals for aid. Extant instructions to a U.S. diplomat in contact with Ho in December, 1946, reveal U.S. preoccupation with his known communist background, and apprehension that he might establish a "communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state." Two months later, when the Franco-Viet Minh war in North Vietnam was underway, Secretary of State Marshall emphasized that "we do not lose sight [of the] fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin."



In May, 1949, Secretary of State Acheson admitted that as a "theoretical possibility" the establishment of a "National Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any area beyond reach [of the] Soviet Army," but pointed out that:

"Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement national aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even slightest deviation...."

When, in early, 1950, Ho's DRV lay within reach of Mao's Chinese Army, and Ho had openly embraced communism, Secretary Acheson declared that bloc recognition of the DRV "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Vietnam."

But Ho's behavior in 1949-1950, however convincingly it endorsed U.S. policy at that juncture, does not necessarily explain away his earlier eagerness for U.S. and U.N. intervention in Vietnam, nor otherwise gainsay the "Tito" hypothesis as applied to the 1945-1947 period. Of that period, it can be said that the U.S. offered Ho only narrow options. He received no replies to his appeals. After 1946, not only were Ho's direct communications with the U.S. cut, but also the signals he received from the U.S. were hardly encouraging. By the time the Indochina war began in earnest in late 1946, U.S. military equipment had already been used by French forces against the Vietnamese, and the U.S. had arranged credit for France to purchase \$160 million worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for use in Indochina. Secretary of State George C. Marshall's public comment on the outbreak of war in January, 1947, was limited to a hope that "a pacific basis for adjustment of the difficulties could be found," and within six months the Marshall Plan threw even greater U.S. resources behind France.

The simple truth seems to be that the U.S. knew little of what was transpiring inside Vietnam, and certainly cared less about Vietnam than about France. Knowing little and caring less meant that real problems and variety of choices were perceived but dimly. For example, the U.S. could have asked itself -- "Did we really have to support France in Southeast Asia in order to support a non-communist France internally and in Europe?" Another question we could have asked ourselves was -- "If the U.S. choice in Vietnam really came down to either French colonialism or Ho Chi Minh, should Ho automatically be excluded?" Again, "If the U.S. choice was to be France, did France have any real chance of succeeding, and if so, at what cost?"

Even before World War II was over, Washington had placed the decision on Ho's fate in the hands of France. It can be argued, nonetheless,



that the U.S. could have insisted that Paris buy Ho and provide Indochinese independence without endangering the more basic relationship between the U.S. and France in Europe. Just as the U.S. came to recognize the prime importance of Europe over any policy it pursued elsewhere, so the French government would have soon realized (if it had not already done so) that nothing should be done to impair seriously U.S. acceptance of common interests in European recovery and collective security. Moreover, it was not as if there were not sizeable segments of the French community which would not have supported graceful U.S. attempts to extricate France from Indochina. It may well be, however, that the "Tito hypothesis" assumes a compliance from France of which France was demonstrably incapable. No French government is likely to have survived a genuinely liberal policy toward Ho in 1945 or 1946; even French communists then favored redemption of control in Indochina. From '46 on, however, bloodshed hardened policy in France. As before, the Ho alternative was never seriously contemplated.

French representations to the contrary notwithstanding, Ho Chi Minh possessed real political strength among the people of Vietnam. While calling Ho another George Washington may be stretching the point, there is no doubt about his being the only popularly-recognized war-time leader of the Vietnamese resistance, and the head of the strongest and only Vietnam-wide political movement. There can be no doubt either that in a test by ballot only Ho's Viet Minh could have delivered votes at the hamlet level. Washington and Paris, however, did not focus on the fact of Ho's strength, only on the consequences of his rule. Paris viewed Ho as a threat to its regaining French economic, cultural and political prerogatives in Indochina. The U.S., wary of Ho's known communist background, was apprehensive that Ho would lead Vietnam into the Soviet, and later Chinese, orbit. President Eisenhower's later remark about Ho's winning a free election in Vietnam with an 80% vote shone through the darkness of our vision about Vietnam; but U.S. policy remained unilluminated.

In the last speculation, U.S. support for Ho Chi Minh would have involved perspicacity and risk. As clear as national or independent or neutral communism may seem today, it was a blurred vision in 1945-1948. Even with the benefit of seeing Tito successfully assert his independence, it would have been hard for Washington to make the leap from there to an analogy in Asia. Recourse to "national communism" in Vietnam as an eventual bulwark against China, indeed, would have called for a perspicacity unique in U.S. history. The risk was there, too. The reality of Ho's strength in Vietnam could have worked seriously against U.S. interests as well as against Chinese Communist interests. Ho's well-known leadership and drive, the iron discipline and effectiveness of the Viet Minh, the demonstrated fighting capability of his armies, a dynamic Vietnamese people under Ho's control, could have produced a dangerous period of Vietnamese expansionism. Laos and Cambodia would have been easy pickings for such a Vietnam. Ho, in fact, always

considered his leadership to extend to Indochina as a whole, and his party was originally called the Indochinese Communist Party. Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, and even Indonesia, could have been next. It could have been the "domino theory" with Ho instead of Mao. And, it could have been the dominoes with Mao. This may seem implausible, but it is only slightly less of a bad dream than what has happened to Vietnam since. The path of prudence rather than the path of risk seemed the wiser choice. (Tab 3)

I.C.

DISCUSSION

Tab 1 - Versions of the "Asian Tito" Hypothesis

Tab 2 - A Political Biography of Ho Chi Minh, 1890-1950

Tab 3 - Ho Chi Minh's Communications With the U.S., 1945-1946



Following are extracts from authors who have advanced arguments that Ho Chi Minh, with the stimulus of U.S. support, might have adopted a non-aligned or, at least, counter-Peking foreign policy. The corollary contention is that Ho was forced to accept dependency on Moscow and Peking by American opposition or indifference.

### Generalizations

(1) None argue that Ho was not a communist or that a communist Vietnam would not have eventuated under Ho's leadership.

(2) Rather, they point out that Ho demonstrated willingness to subordinate communist goals and forms to attaining nationalist objectives. They accept a communist Vietnam, indeed even favor it, on the grounds that only a national communism led by Ho would be sufficiently strong to maintain independence of the Chinese.

(3) They stress the historic Vietnamese antipathy to the Chinese as a pillar of Viet nationalism, and point to Ho's attempts in 1945 and 1946 to obtain Western backing.

(4) No really close parallel can be drawn between the origins of Ho Chi Minh and Tito, since unlike Tito, Ho fought his way to power in virtual isolation, without the intervention of an external communist power. However, it can be accurately said that U.S. policies in Europe have generally been directed at widening the split between Tito and Moscow, while in Asia, our policy has tended to force Ho into closer relations with Peking and Hanoi.

(5) The "Tito" issue raises pointedly the question of whether U.S. strategy in Asia is anti-communist or anti-Chinese. Since to block Soviet expansion in Europe the U.S. set aside its repugnance to Tito's communism, it is argued, the U.S. should similarly renounce its opposition to Ho to serve its larger strategic interests in Asia.

### Synopses

#### Page

Isaacs, Harold; No Peace for Asia.

In 1947, Ho was motivated by a deep nationalism aimed principally at independence, and was sorely disenchanted with communism, having received little or no help or encouragement from foreign parties. Literally the U.S. was the only power to whom Viet nationalists could turn with hope, but even then the U.S. actions in support of France stood in contrast to its principled pronouncements in favor of self-determination and against colonialism..... C-11

Shaplen, Robert; The Lost Revolution.

There was a strong possibility in 1945 and 1946 that French and American policy could have "Titofied" Ho Chi Minh, and that Vietnam--albeit under left-wing leadership--might have been a bulwark against Communist Chinese expansion. But the possibility of Vietnam's now becoming a Yugoslavia is remote..... C-14

Zinn, Howard; Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal.

A Communist government in Vietnam is the best avenue for improving the lot of the Vietnamese; Ho Chi Minh's dictatorship would be preferable to any elitist dictatorship in South Vietnam. If the U.S. wants to contain China, the U.S. should recognize that Ho Chi Minh would strive to maintain his independence, and thus would accomplish what our military force cannot..... C-18

Bator, Victor; Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy.

1954: China is most important problem facing Vietnam. Double-satellite relationship affords the DRV potential independence. Diem's fanaticism obtruded..... C-20

Sacks, Milton; "Marxism in Southeast Asia."

1946-1949: Ho attempted to preserve neutrality, although this conflicted with his desire for international support and recognition for DRV..... C-21

Buttinger, Joseph; Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled.

1946-1947: Ho realized that he could not rally Vietnamese to his struggle for independence with the banner of communism. Hence, the facade of democracy to lend righteousness to the forceful communist campaign to align the people with the Viet Minh and the DRV.....C-23

Kennedy, John F., quoted in Schlesinger, Arthur M., ed.,  
A Thousand Days.

1951: U.S. has joined France in a desperate attempt to preserve empire. U.S. must not rely on arms alone to halt southward thrust of communism, but must harness nationalism..C-24

Schlesinger, Arthur M.; The Bitter Heritage.

The most effective bulwark against an aggressive communist state may well be national communism. A rational U.S. policy aimed at containing China could have recognized communist Vietnam in 1954, vice backing a shaky Saigon regime led by right-wing mandarins or generals.....C-25

Fall, Bernard B.; Viet-Nam Witness.

The Vietnamese Communists had to conduct their revolution without aid from abroad, even from French Communists.....C-26



Eden, Anthony, Earl of Avon; Toward Peace in Indochina.

The Ho-Peking relationship is not a close parallel to the Tito-Moscow one. Yet Ho has much to gain from neutrality, and much at risk in failing to maintain its Moscow links, or to open a way to American withdrawal.....C-27

Fulbright, Senator J. William; The Arrogance of Power.

Ho Chi Minh is the only truly national leader of the Vietnamese; he is also a communist. Vietnamese communism is perhaps the only potential bulwark against Chinese domination. Hence, the U.S. should try to come to terms....C-28

Reischauer, Edwin O.; "What Choices Do We Have In Vietnam?"

The U.S. could have taken a stand against colonialism in 1945, refused to support France in 1950, backed the Geneva settlement in 1954, and declined to increase its military commitment in 1961. Four Presidents rejected the alternative of furthering Ho Chi Minh's cause, but had any done so, the outcome would have been a highly nationalist Vietnam fiercely independent of China. Moreover, Ho's cordial World War II relations with the U.S. indicated a potential for a Tito-like U.S.-Vietnam relationship of no more baleful consequences for Southeast Asia than the present war-torn states. But a nationalist Vietnam would be far preferable, from the U.S. long-range viewpoint, to status quo.....C-29

Excerpt from No Peace for Asia by Harold Isaacs, 1947, quoted in Viet Nam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis, Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., 1965, pp. 49-50, 53-55.

Ho Chi Minh was born in the province of Vinh, in northern Annam. "The home of revolutionists," the Annamites call that place with its sparse hills and valleys, its thickly crowded population. From out of that mass grubbing in the soil to live has come a peculiarly large proportion of Indochina's greatest national leaders. As a boy of twelve, Ho began his revolutionary career as a courier, carrying messages from village to village for his conspiring elders. Today, at fifty-five, he likes to think of himself as a man who has cast aside parties and programs. He speaks not in class political terms but in nationalist terms. "My party is my country," he liked to say; "my program is independence." In long discussions we had of the problems of the Nationalist movement in general and in Indochina in particular, he would impatiently wave aside all misgivings. "Independence is the thing," he said. "What follows will follow. But independence must come first if there is to be anything to follow at all later on."

\* \* \*

Upon whom could [the Vietnamese now]...count? Certainly not now upon the Chinese. China was so immensely larger than the little Republic of Vietnam--and perhaps there would come a day when China would have realized her capacities and assumed her place as the leader of Asia. On that day Vietnam would profit, perhaps, from being China's neighbor. But China now was weak and assailed, rent by internal struggles and external pressures. It was ruled by the kind of men who were in northern Indochina now, sucking at the land like leeches. Because they held the French at arm's length, they were temporarily helpful. But that could not last. The Chinese were already negotiating their settlement with the French and would be interested only in gaining their own immediate ends. From those ends, Annamite nationalism had little enough to gain.

What of the Russians? Would they bring any strong political support to the Annamite cause? I met no Annamite who thought so; and I spoke to many Annamite Communists. The Annamite Communists, like all their fellow nationalists, suffered from a terrifying sense of their isolation. They were unusually frank and cynical about the Russians. Even the most orthodox among them, like shaggy-haired Dran Van Giau, the partisan organizer, granted that the Russians went in for "an excess of ideological compromise," and said he expected no help from that quarter, no matter how distant or verbal it might be. "The Russians are nationalists for Russia first and above all," another Annamite



Communist said with some bitterness. "They would be interested in us only if we served some purpose of theirs. Right now, unfortunately, we do not seem to serve any such purpose."

"How about the French Communists?" I asked. He snorted with disgust. "The French Communists," he said, "are Frenchmen and colonialists first and Communists after. In principle they are for us, but in practice? Oho, that is quite another thing!" One of the top-ranking Annamite Communists spoke contemptuously of Thorez, who in a Paris speech has said he was in favor of the Annamites "finally arriving at their independence." He laughed sourly. "A fine rubber phrase, is it not? You can stretch it into any shape or any meaning. They are the dominant party in France now. And look what Frenchmen are doing now in Indochina."

"From the small handful of French Communists in Indochina, the Annamite comrades learned a remarkable lesson in their kind of politics. There were only twenty in the French Communist group in Saigon. "Of these only one," said my Annamite Communists companion, "only one solidarized with us. The rest stood aside." The French group prepared a document for the Indochinese Communist Party which bore the date of September 25--two days after the French had seized power in the city. I was able to read the document, but not to copy it, so the notes I made immediately afterward are not verbatim. But the substance was as follows: It advised the Annamite Communists to be sure, before they acted too rashly, that their struggle "meets the requirements of Soviet policy." It warned that any "premature adventures" in Annamite independence might "not be in line with Soviet perspectives." These perspectives might well include France as a firm ally of the USSR in Europe, in which case the Annamite independence movement would be an embarrassment. Therefore it urged upon the Annamite comrades a policy of "patience." It advised them in particular to wait upon the results of the French elections, coming up the following month, in October, when additional Communist strength might assure the Annamites a better settlement. In the meantime it baldly proposed that an emissary be sent not only to contact the French Communist Party but also the Russians "in order to acquaint yourselves with the perspectives of coming events."

This document displayed with remarkable and unusual bluntness the Communist Party's notion of the relation between a revolutionary movement and Soviet foreign policy. It apparently came as a shock to the Annamite Communists, who were thrown into considerable confusion by it. There was a sharp internal argument within the party which ended in a decision to dissolve the party entirely, to cease functioning within the Vietminh as a distinct unit but to work in it purely as individuals. In this way the party apparently figured on avoiding any responsibility at a time when its responsibility was the heaviest. I do not know what

the internal development was in any detail, but I do know that the Annamite Communists I met were men bitten deeply with the bitterness of having been abandoned by their ideological comrades overseas. They had consequently taken refuge in a pure and simple nationalism. Ho Chi Minh was making no idle phrase when he said: "My party is my country." They were oppressed, in common with all the non-Communist Annamite nationalist leaders, by a fearful sense of loneliness. There seemed to be support for them against the French nowhere, none from the Chinese they could count on, none that could be anticipated from the Russians, none from the French Communists, who did gain enormous strength in those October elections without effecting any noticeable change in Indochinese affairs. What then of the United States?

Annamite nationalists spoke of the United States as men speak of a hope they know is forlorn but to which they desperately cling all the same. Could all the fine phrases of the Atlantic Charter, of the United Nations pact, of President Roosevelt and his successor, really have meant nothing at all? Nothing? All right, let us make allowances for expediency, for big-power politics, for all the shabby realities. Would not the United States still find it wiser for the sake of its position in the Far East to win support among the people rather than to cling to the rotten imperial system of the past? It seemed not. For the only indication the Annamites had of America's role in their struggle came in the form of lend-lease weapons and equipment being used against them by the French and British, and the stunning announcement of an American deal with France for the purchase of \$160,000,000 worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for the French in Indochina. To the Annamites this looked like American underwriting of the French reconquest. The Americans were democrats in words but no help in fact, just as the Russians were communists in words but no help in fact. "We apparently stand quite alone," said Ho Chi-minh simply. "We shall have to depend on ourselves."



Chapter II - Ho Chi Minh - the Untried Gamble, pp. 27, 46-50

I have always shared the belief of many, if not most, observers who were in Indochina at the time that a serious mistake was made by both the French and the Americans, especially by the dominant French policymakers in Paris, in not dealing more realistically with Ho in 1945 and 1946, when there was a strong possibility that he might have been "Titofied" before Tito and Titoism were ever heard of; that the whole course of events might thereby have been altered and a great deal of bloodshed averted; and that today a unified Vietnam, even under some form of left-wing leadership, might have been the bulwark of a neutral bloc of Southeast Asian states seeking, above all, to avoid Chinese Communist domination. Some of the highest American officials have privately told me, in recent years, that they now believe the gamble with Ho should have been taken; in fact, a considerable number of them are again talking about Vietnam becoming a Southeast Asian Yugoslavia, a possibility that seems to me now rather remote.

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In Biarritz, where he first rested, in Paris and then at the conference in Fontainebleau, Ho enjoyed huge personal success. He charmed everyone, especially the press. He distributed roses to girl reporters, signed his name in blood for an American male correspondent. He was widely compared to Confucius, to the Buddha, to St. John the Baptist, to anyone's doting grandfather, and it was noted that he was an ascetic, since, among other things, he refused to take a drink. Everywhere he went, whether to the opera, to a fancy reception, to a picnic, or to a press conference, he appeared in his simple, high-buttoned linen work suit. "As soon as one approaches this frail man, one shares the admiration of all men around him, over whom he towers with his serenity acquired from wide experience," wrote one reporter. Noting his "tormented face and his eyes of blue which burn with an inner light," another declared that he "hides a soul of steel behind a fragile body." His wit, his Oriental courtesy, his savoir-faire, his mixed profundity and playfulness in social intercourse, his open love for children, above all his seeming sincerity and simplicity, captured one and all.

Unfortunately, in point of accomplishment Ho's trip was far less successful. The fault, now generally admitted, was chiefly that of

the French, who, while the conference went on, continued to violate its spirit by further fostering the idea of the separate south and central federation in Indochina....

When he and Sainteny finally flew up to Paris for the start of the talks, Sainteny described him as "pale, eyes brilliant, and tight-throated," and he quoted Ho as saying, when the plane was settling down, "Above all, don't leave me, whatever you do." As the conference dawdled in the shadow of defeat, by now the result of the activities of the Vietminh extremists in Hanoi as well as of the French maneuvers in Cochin China, Ho grew more and more restless. Sainteny agreed he ought to return to Hanoi as soon as possible. "What would I be able to do if I went home empty-handed?" Ho asked. "Don't let me leave this way," he begged Sainteny and Marius Moutet, the Socialist Minister of Overseas Territories. "Arm me against those who would seek to displace me. You will not regret it." It was a significant plea, as significant as what Ho said on another evening to Sainteny and Moutet, "If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who will tire of it."

At midnight on September 14, 1946, the frail figure of Ho Chi Minh, in its military tunic, walked out of the Hotel Royal-Monceau in Paris (the Fontainebleau sessions had ended) and strolled to Moutet's house nearby. There Ho and Moutet signed a modus vivendi, which, while it underlined Vietnamese (and some French) concessions for safeguarding French rights in Indochina, only postponed agreement on basic political questions; it at least placed upon the French the responsibility for restoring order in Cochin China. This was nothing more than had been agreed to in the spring and been vitiated since, but Ho publicly called the modus vivendi "better than nothing." He murmured to a security officer who accompanied him back to the hotel early in the morning, however, "I have just signed my death warrant."

Despite the failure of his mission, Ho, in his true cosmopolitan fashion, had enjoyed his stay in Paris, a city he had always loved. Years before, standing on a bridge across the Seine, he had remarked to a Communist comrade, "What a wonderful city, what a wonderful scene!" When his friend had replied that Moscow was also beautiful, Ho had said, "Moscow is heroic, Paris is the joy of living." During the 1946 conference, Ho had revisited some of his former haunts and, mixing socially with several foreign correspondents, had talked freely about himself and his politics. "Everyone has the right to his own doctrine," he had said. "I studied and chose Marx. Jesus said two thousand years ago that one should love one's enemies. That dogma has not been realized. When will Marxism be realized? I cannot answer....To achieve a Communist society, big industrial and agricultural production is necessary....I do not know when that will be realized in Vietnam, where production is low. We are not yet in a position to meet the conditions."



Ho's self-analysis, in relation to Indochina's development is a markedly honest one, in Marxist terms. From the outset, Marxism was far more than a blueprint for him. It was a logique, and as one of the keenest Indochina scholars, Paul Mus, has pointed out, it was acquired by Ho as a vital Western weapon, an arsenal in fact, with which, as an Asian, he could combat his French masters. Ho, as a Marxist, was quick to appreciate how his country was being robbed, kept in economic penury by a purposefully unimaginative colonial power. While the French took out rubber or rice or whatever else they wanted and sold it in the world market at a high profit, the Vietnamese lived under a system in which only human labor and not money, in any international sense, counted; goods were in effect bartered for subsistence. Such an economic condition became the fulcrum of Ho's anger and drove him way back, almost inevitably, to Marxism and thence to Communism. "Ho had to build on what every Asian must build per se," Mus says, "a Western logic to deal with us Europeans. Whether it be a profession such as the law or medicine or what have you, an Asian must find this logique or be lost. Ho found it first in Marxism and he became a Leninist, since Lenin was faced in Russia with the same problem of the vacuum at the village level. Ho was successful because he remained true to Leninism and Marxism. In this sense, straightforward according to his view, he belongs to a proper fraternity."

Along with Sainteny, Mus is one of those Frenchmen who admit that France and the Western world missed a proper opportunity with Ho in 1946. Mus himself, as a French negotiator, met Ho a year later, and he has the same queer fondness for him most men who knew him have retained. "I have no reason, as a Frenchman, to like Ho for what he has done," Mus told me long afterward, "but still I like him. I am not afraid to say so. I like him for his strong mind. Although he is a great actor--one cannot afford to be naive with him--he does not go back on his word. He believes in the truth as he sees it. But he is a Marxist, and that is where we part company." He quotes Ho as telling him, in 1947, "My only weapon is anger....I won't disarm my people until I trust you." Ho's willingness to deal with the French, Mus believes, was largely predicated on his need for French advice, above all for financial advisers. "Marxist doctrine calls for the proletarian state to use, at least temporarily, the accountancy of the bourgeois-capitalist countries," Mus says. Because of the inbred economy imposed by the Bank of Indochina, Ho knew that Vietnam could not stand on its own feet, either in terms of money or trade. He also knew he could not rely on the colonial French. His political approach was through metropolitan France. He wasn't convinced that this was his only chance, but he was determined to play the possibilities. He wavered between his affection and regard for France, which had given him his self in the Marxist image, and his new disillusion of 1946. "If we had supported

him more strongly then," Mus added, "we might have won....We thought we could crush him if it came to war. We did not appreciate how hard he could fight. But we must not forget that he really wanted an agreement with France at the time of Fontainebleau because it would have served him. That part of his motivation afterward died, of course, but we should understand that it existed at the time and that he was truly disappointed."



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The perspective of history suggests that a united Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh is preferable to the elitist dictatorship of the South, just as Maoist China with all its faults is preferable to the rule of Chiang, and Castro's Cuba to Batista's. We do not have pure choices in the present, although we should never surrender those values which can shape the future. Right now, for Vietnam, a Communist government is probably the best avenue available to that whole packet of human values which make up the common morality of mankind today; the preservation of human life, self-determination, economic security, the end of race and class oppression, and that freedom of speech and press which an educated population begins to demand.

In the debate on Vietnam, there has been little or no discussion on exactly what would be the evil consequences of a united Communist Vietnam. It has become an article of faith that what is good or bad in international relations is a matter of counting up the countries that are on the Communist side, and the number that are on our side. There is the black eye, and there is the feather in the cap. And the difference is worth a mountain of corpses.

We need to get accustomed to the idea that there will be more Communist countries in the world, and that this is not necessarily bad. The physical security of the United States is ~~not~~ diminished by that fact in itself; Communist nations in their international affairs behave very much like other nations (this is why they are so often disappointing to their sympathizers); some are friendly, some are hostile. Each is a unique resultant of Marxist theory and local conditions. The more there are, the greater diversity there will be among them. It is several years now since scholars in the field of Communist studies began taking note of "polycentrism," but American officials still often act as if there were one Communist center in the world.

One thing we should have learned by now is that Communist nations are as prone to the emotion of nationalism as other nations; they crave independence and resist domination by any other nation, whether capitalist or Communist. What this means is that a small but effective Communist nation which is neighbor to a large one can guard its independence far better than a non-Communist, semifeudal dictatorship. A Communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh can be expected to retain its independence as surely as Tito has maintained his.

The idea of "containment" has always been ambiguous: Is it our aim to contain China, or to contain Communism? And if it is both, then what do we do if the two aims turn out to be in conflict with one another?

To base our entire Asian policy on "containing" China is to risk billions of dollars and thousands of lives on the idea that China plans to take over other countries by military expansion -- a hypothesis not supported either by her words or by the history of her behavior so far, and one that in the case of the Soviet Union turned out to be false. And to make the hypothesis doubly faulty, it assumes that even if China wanted to expand, she could.



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In spite of the dangerous geographic proximity of China and the earlier dependence of Ho Chi Minh on Chinese military support, there was, in 1954, some possibility that Ho Chi Minh's government might have been amenable to diplomatic contacts looking to real stabilization. He had in his government several non-Marxists who might have helped such an undertaking. Vietnam's millennial history is filled with intermittently successful attempts to free the country from Chinese domination. "The most important question facing both North and South Vietnam," wrote an anti-Diem and anti-Communist Vietnamese of high repute, "is how to safeguard the future of the whole Vietnamese nation now threatened by such number and such great dynamism (of the Chinese)."

North Vietnam's double-satellite relationship (to Moscow and Peking) potentially creates a limited measure of independence from both. The Vietnamese Communists turned to Russia and her European satellites for the help they needed after Geneva in order to recover from the devastations of a seven-year civil war. With this help North Vietnam may now be increasingly independent of China. Even if the rank and file of the leadership were impervious to the pride of independence, it is a safe assumption that Ho Chi Minh himself, now an "elder statesman" of the Communist world, is not unlike other national leaders: He most certainly does not enjoy being a mere puppet. He seems to have the talent and subtlety to maneuver between the Scylla and Charybdis of commitment to China and Russia. Thus, diplomacy directed at real neutralization of Vietnam, even if not fully approved by Peking, might have achieved some success in the years 1955-1960. Of course, to the irreconcilable fanatic, Diem, any contact with Ho Chi Minh would have been anathema. But American policy was not necessarily condemned to serve Mr. Diem's nervous system, especially since there was plenty of opposition to him among his own countrymen.

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During this same period (1946-1949), the Ho Chi Minh government carefully sought to maintain friendly relations with the Thai and Nationalist Chinese governments. In addition, a determined propaganda effort was made to enlist the sympathy of the other Southeast Asian states for the Vietnamese struggle. In the developing cold war situation that polarized international relations, the Viet Minh leadership publicly refused to take sides and announced a policy of neutrality. Even when the Soviet Union and the world Communist press affirmed that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist or stressed that the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was part of the "world Democratic Front" fighting against "American imperialism," the Viet-Nam government itself maintained a discreet silence. The Vietnamese Communists did not feature the usual pro-Soviet, anti-American vituperative attacks so common to the world Communist movement. As late as March 1949, President Ho Chi Minh continued to denounce the charge of "communist domination" of the government he headed as "pure French imperialist propaganda."

This policy of denying links to Communism conflicted with the Ho Chi Minh government's practice of strengthening the ties between mass organizations in Viet-Nam and the agencies of international Communism. Supporters of the Viet Minh government claimed that this practice was the only way the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was able to get some international recognition. The conflict was there nonetheless, and such participation in front organizations raised difficulties: for example, when representatives of the youth organizations in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam attended the regional meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth at Calcutta in February 1948. Since this meeting was used as a means of publicly emphasizing the new Communist strategy in Southeast Asia that led to Communist insurrections in Malaya, Burma and Indonesia, the Vietnamese representatives were placed in an ambiguous position. They could and did point with pride to the "liberation struggle" that they had been waging. Yet, at the same time, they did not repudiate the avowedly successful policy of coalition with the "national bourgeoisie" pursued in Viet-Nam. They simply avoided the issue posed by the new policy that stressed attacks on the "bourgeois nationalists," the need for Communist party leadership of liberation struggles, and the necessity of direct ties with the Soviet world camp.

This deviation from general Southeast Asian Communist policy during 1948-49 may be described as another demonstration of the tactical flexibility of Ho Chi Minh's leadership. The Viet Minh was already leading to a highly effective armed struggle against the French in Viet-Nam and enjoyed the support of many Vietnamese nationalists who believed the non-Communist declarations of the spokesmen for the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. Moreover, its government had a measure of sympathy and



support internationally from non-Communist, anticolonialist world opinion. To squander these assets simply to enunciate ideological statements commensurate with Communist-bloc pronouncements would have been a high price to pay at any time. Yet, the view may well be entertained that Ho Chi Minh and some other Viet Minh leaders wanted the greater measure of independence that nonalignment with either bloc would afford, and hoped perhaps to escape thereby the inevitable polarization of the nationalist movement in Viet-Nam with all its attendant negative consequences.

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But no one knew better than Ho Chi Minh that the struggle for independence could not be conducted under the banner of Communism. The establishment of an open dictatorship of their party would only have brought about the collapse of the ingenious political edifice through which they dominated the entire nationalist movement. The more the regime evolved toward one-party rule, the greater became the need for democratic rhetoric and ritual, and for a splendid facade of democratic institutions. The constitution submitted to the Assembly was designed for this purpose. It was adopted, with 240 against 2 votes, on November 8 /1945/.

\* \* \*

If the lofty principles of this constitution had no influence on the political evolution of the Hanoi regime, the reason is not that the outbreak of the war several weeks later prevented the D.R.V.N. from realizing the promise contained in its name. The Communists determined the nature of the regime even more after the outbreak of the war than before, and as far as they were concerned, the purpose of the constitution was not to create the basis for a democratic regime: It was their contention, in Vietnam no less than in the "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe, that the regime they had set up was democratic, was in fact a "higher form of democracy" than existed in any Western state. Outsiders, and especially people who believe that Communist political theory is basically dishonest, find this hard to understand. But the democratic principles of the constitution were laid down not merely as a means to camouflage the progressive development of the regime toward a Communist-led one-party dictatorship. These freedoms were meant for the entire people, to be denied only to "reactionaries," "traitors," "collaborators," "troublemakers," and other "enemies of the people," in brief anyone whose political activities the Communists considered harmful to the national cause, the political and organizational custodian of which was the Viet Minh and later the Lien Viet.

Even before the armed conflict spread over the entire country, the Communists felt perfectly justified in demanding that their nationalist rivals exercise their political rights only in support of the Viet Minh regime. Opposition to the Viet Minh was synonymous with acting against the interests of the state. There is no denying that the Communists introduced radical democratic reforms such as Vietnam had never known before, and that they established almost every known type of democratic institution. But it is equally true that they had no compunction about imprisoning or even murdering people who tried to enjoy these reforms or use these institutions to oppose the Viet Minh.



Excerpt from Arthur M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1965, p. 321.

1951: "In Indochina," Kennedy said, on his return to Washington, "we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of a French regime to hang on to the remnants of empire....To check the southern drive of communism makes sense but not only through reliance on the force of arms. The task is rather to build strong native non-communist sentiment within these areas and rely on that as a spearhead of defense rather than upon the legions of General de Lattre. To do this apart from and in defiance of innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure." The trip gave Kennedy both a new sympathy for the problems of Asia and a new understanding of the power of nationalism in the underdeveloped world.

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...The two heaviest blows recently suffered by Peking -- the destruction of the Communist Party in Indonesia and the declaration of independence by North Korea -- took place without benefit of American patronage or rhetoric. Indeed, too overt American intervention may actually have the effect of smothering the forces of local nationalism or driving them to the other side and thereby ultimately weakening the containment of China.

In the unpredictable decades ahead, the most effective bulwark against an aggressive national communist state in some circumstances may well be national communism in surrounding states. A rational policy of containing China could have recognized that a communist Vietnam under Ho might be a better instrument of containment than a shaky Saigon regime led by right-wing mandarins or air force generals. Had Ho taken over all Vietnam in 1954, he might today be soliciting Soviet support to strengthen his resistance to Chinese pressure, and this situation, however appalling for the people of South Vietnam, would obviously be better for the United States than the one in which we are floundering today. And now, alas, it may be almost too late: the whole thrust of United States policy since 1954, and more than ever since the bombing of the north began, has been not to pry Peking and Hanoi apart but to drive them together.



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It is vital to remember that, unlike any other successful communist movement, the Vietnamese party fought its way to ruling power in virtual isolation. In Eastern Europe, Soviet troops were always present in the countries where communist takeovers took place; in fact, they were an essential ingredient. In China, the turnover to the communists of vast stores of Japanese arms by the Soviet Forces in Manchuria was of vital importance to the CCPs military success, and the Russian military presence in North Korea ensured the creation of a "people's democracy" there. In Albania, Tito's partisans played the role of Soviet troops elsewhere. In the Viet-Nam of 1945, on the contrary, the D.R.V.N. had no such support from either the Soviets or even the Chinese Communists (then bottled-up in the hills of northwestern China); and connections with the French CP, then just emerging from four years of clandestinity, were probably nonexistent for the simple reason that the first postwar ships to go from France to Indochina only reached Saigon in late September 1945 -- and these were troop transports bringing the vanguard of the French Expeditionary Force. In other words, the Vietnamese Communists literally had to play their revolution alone and by ear.

Pages 22-24

If Peking is obsessed by its wrongful impression of American intentions, Hanoi's opinion may eventually prove less decided. Moscow's judgment has influence in North Vietnam which can at times balance Peking's. If China's support is the tougher and more resolutely proclaimed, a number of Hanoi's communist leaders are Moscow trained, including Ho Chi Minh himself. Moreover, historic instincts can be strong, however left the leaders. The Vietnamese might not relish a fate which could relegate them to serve as China's southernmost imperial outpost, even for a time.

There are risks also for North Vietnam in the growing Sino-Soviet bitterness. Recently the Chinese Government have even ignored all anniversaries of friendship with their Vietnam campaign a cause of complaint against Russia, while dawdling Soviet supplies on their journey. That is not cozy for Hanoi, which has no wish to quarrel with either communist great power but could find the extreme Chinese demands increasingly prickly to live with.

The parallel which is sometimes drawn between Marshal Tito and Moscow and Ho Chi Minh and Peking is not, however, close. North Vietnam is at war and in no position to quarrel with its chief provider of arms and supplies. Even in less arduous conditions, China would still be the big neighbor, as well as the big brother, and difficult to defy, if such a thing could be even dreamed of. All the same there is more scope for eventual agreement with Hanoi than with Peking, despite the tragic trail of blood and suffering, or maybe because of it.

It is Vietnam, not China, which has had the losses in life and in wealth, from schools to communications. Some day, somehow this has to end. Moreover, even the North has much to gain from forming part of a girdle of neutral states, or at least from seeing such a girdle formed to the south and southwest of its territory. For this to be possible, Hanoi must accept two glimpses of reality, though they need never be publicly proclaimed. The first is that the United States cannot be beaten, the second is that while a United States military withdrawal might find its place in a phased timetable within an agreement, there is not a remote chance of even a partial American withdrawal unless North Vietnam plays its part, although a negative one, to make this possible.



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At the heart of the Vietnam tragedy is the fact that the most powerful nationalist movement in that country is one which is also communist. Ho Chi Minh is not a mere agent of Communist China, much less of the "international communist conspiracy" that we used to hear so much about. He is a bona-fide nationalist revolutionary, the leader of his country's rebellion against French colonialism. He is also a communist, and that is the essential reason why since at least 1950 he has been regarded as an enemy by the United States.

\* \* \*

This outline, highly abbreviated though it is, illustrates a most important fact -- the merger of nationalism and communism in Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. It is not meaningful to speak of the Viet Minh as more nationalist than communist or as more communist than nationalist; it is both. The merger is a misfortune from the viewpoint of American interests and preferences, but it is also a fact, a fact with which we can and should come to terms. Even today, after all that America has done to sustain the South Vietnamese government, there is only one politician whose name is known to peasants all over Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh.

It is important to be very clear about what is meant by "nationalism." It has been best described by Hans Kohn as a "state of mind" which regards the nation as "the ideal form of political organization and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural energy and of economic well being." Understood in this way, nationalism is not necessarily humane or democratic, socially constructive or responsive to individual needs. It is merely powerful -- powerful in a sense of being able to mobilize the loyalty and active support of vast numbers of ordinary people. When one describes Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Minh or the Viet Cong as "nationalist," it is not to be inferred that they are regarded as saints. Far from it: they have demonstrated again and again that they are fanatical and cruel, but they have also shown that they are patriots, that they have identified themselves with the nation and its mystique, with that "state of mind" which more than any other in our time inspires ordinary people to acts of loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice.

For our purposes, the significance of Ho Chi Minh's nationalism is that it is associated with what Bernard Fall has called "the 2,000-year-old distrust in Vietnam of everything Chinese." Vietnamese communism is therefore a potential bulwark -- perhaps the only potential bulwark -- against Chinese domination of Vietnam. It is for this reason that I believe that we should try, if it is not yet too late, to come to terms with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong.



Look, September 19, 1967, page 27

The obvious alternative was to allow Ho and his Communist-dominated Vietminh to take over the whole of Vietnam. This would have happened early if the United States had made quite clear in 1945 that it did not approve of the revival of colonialism in Asia and would give it no support. It would still have happened if we had not given massive aid to the French war effort after 1949. It would have happened if we had been willing in 1954 to support the Geneva agreements and had not tried to build up a permanent regime under Diem in South Vietnam. It would have happened if we had not steadily increased our military commitments to South Vietnam between 1960 and 1963. It would have happened if we had decided against massive participation in the war in the winter of 1964-'65. Thus, under each of our last four Presidents, decisions were clearly made, even if not fully thought out, to reject this one obvious alternative.

What would have happened if, at any of these moments of decision, we had chosen the alternative? If we had clearly favored Vietnamese nationalism over French colonialism in 1945, it seems obvious that Ho, in short order, would have established effective control over the whole of Vietnam. He probably would have set up the same sort of dictatorial, oppressive, Communist rule over all Vietnam that he actually did over the North. He would probably have encountered much the same sort of problems he did in the North, and the economic progress of Vietnam would have been slow, though, of course, not as slow as in a war-torn land.

The society and government of this unified Vietnam would probably not have been something we would have approved of, but we have not found much we could approve of in the society and government of a divided Vietnam either. Quite possibly, a unified Vietnam under Ho, spared the ravages of war, would have gone at least as far toward the evolution of a stable and reasonably just society as has the divided, war-torn land we know today. For us, however, the question is what that sort of Vietnam would have meant in international politics. I believe it would be safe to assume that it would have been a highly nationalistic Vietnam. By the same token, I believe it also would have been free of Chinese domination. The Vietnamese have instinctive fears of their great northern neighbor. While they have always admired and imitated China, for more than a millennium they have had a deep national tradition of resistance to its domination. If they had had no specific reason to fear or resent us, the chances are that their fears and resentments would have come to focus on China, whether or not it, too, were Communist.

It seems highly probable that Ho's Communist-dominated regime, if it had been allowed by us to take over all Vietnam at the end of the war, would have moved to a position with relation to China not unlike that of Tito's



Yugoslavia toward the Soviet Union. Ho, like Tito, had had cordial wartime relations with us. He apparently expected our continued friendship and had more to hope for in economic aid from us than China. He and his associates were ardent nationalists and probably had deeper fears and suspicions of the Chinese than the Yugoslavs had of the Russians. While such a Vietnam might have been more circumspect and respectful toward China than Tito has been toward the Soviet Union, it would probably have been even more fiercely independent. The way in which Hanoi has sought to maintain its independence of Peking and Moscow, despite the military dependence on both, which was forced on it by the protracted war with us, suggests how strongly independent a Communist Vietnam would have been, if not pushed by these military necessities.

Would such a Communist regime in all Vietnam have been a serious menace to its neighbors or to world peace? I doubt it. A Communist take-over in all Vietnam shortly after the end of the war would probably have seemed to the rest of the world no more of a Communist triumph than the successive victories of Communists over anti-Communists that have taken place in Vietnam since 1945. It is hard to believe that a united Communist Vietnam would have had any more harmful an influence on Laos than a divided war-torn Vietnam has had. Laos and Cambodia might have fallen under Vietnamese influence, but this at least would have kept them out of Chinese control. Or, possibly, Cambodia's traditional animosity toward Vietnam would have induced it to veer further away than it has from association with the Communist nations, if South Vietnam, too, had been Communist. Thailand would probably have been less adversely affected by an entirely Communist Vietnam than it has been by the prolonged war there. Meanwhile, a united, strongly nationalistic Vietnam, while paying lip service to Communist China, would probably have served as a far more effective dike against the southward extension of Chinese power and influence than have a North Vietnam forced into military dependence on China and an unstable South Vietnam. And this general situation in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, which would have been so much less unsatisfactory for us than what we have today, would have been achieved without any of the terrible costs that have mounted so high.

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF  
HO CHI MINH, 1890-1950

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## I. C. 2. A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF HO CHI MINH, 1890-1950

There have been two periods in the life of Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), in which he ostensibly devoted himself wholly to Vietnamese Nationalism. The first period was in the early years before 1920 when Ho Chi Minh was an avid anti-colonialist, but not yet caught up in the communist revolution. The second period of seeming nationalist preoccupation was from 1945 to 1950, when Ho tried to negotiate with the French, appealed to the U.S., UK and China for intervention in Vietnam, denied being a communist, and avoided any ostensible link between the DRV and the Kremlin. The remainder of Ho Chi Minh's political life has been that of a classic communist, anti-colonial, nationalist revolutionary -- exile, Moscow schools, prison, covert operations, guerrilla warfare, party politics. A chronology of his career through 1950 is attached, (pp. C-48 ff).

### 1. Forming the Political Man

Ho Chi Minh was born Nguyen Van Thanh, 19 May 1890, in Kim-Lien in the northern Annam province of Nghe-An (in what is now North Vietnam). Ho was exposed early in life to bitter resentment of the French presence in Vietnam; his father was jailed at Poulo Condore for participation in nationalist activities. Ho's secondary education took place in a hotbed of nationalism, Hue's Lycee Quoc-Hoc. His schooling terminated around 1910 before he received a diploma, but still he acquired more education than most of his compatriots. His decision to work as a mess boy on a French liner in 1912 has been regarded by Bernard Fall as a key political decision -- that is, Fall held that Ho, unlike most conservative fellow Nationalists, thereby opted for the West (republicanism, democracy, popular sovereignty, etc.), against the East (militarism, mandarinal society, etc.). 1/ If the going to sea were a significant decision at all, it probably showed only that Ho was not inclined to follow the normal path of Vietnamese nationalism. This fact was borne out by Ho's break with his father, Nguyen Tat Sac, who had given him a letter for Phan Chu Trinh, a veteran Viet nationalist, in Paris. Sac had hoped Phan would tutor Ho in Vietnamese nationalism, but Ho could not accept Phan's "peaceful cooperation with the French," and left Paris; thereafter he severed his ties with his father. 2/

As a young Asian struggling to earn a living in pre-World War I Europe and America, Ho had been exposed to the racial inequalities of the Western civilization and perhaps sought security when he joined the Chinese-dominated Overseas Workers Association, a clandestine, anti-colonialist organization concerned with improving the working conditions of foreign laborers but increasingly a political force. Ho went to France from London in 1917 with the war in the forefront, and the Russian Leninist revolution in the background. Looking on himself as a political organizer and writer of sorts, Ho signed his articles Nguyen Ai Quoc (which means "Nguyen-the-Patriot") -- an alias by which all Vietnam came to know him until he became



Ho Chi Minh in 1943. As a Paris writer, anti-colonialist nationalism was the major theme for his back room newspaper -- Viet Nam Hon (The Soul of Vietnam). Ho also produced a widely-read attack on French colonial policy called French Colonization on Trial, which purportedly became the "bible of nationalists" in Vietnam. 3/ Caught up in the patriotic fervor of the armistice, Ho produced an eight-point program to present at Versailles:

"Attracted by the promise of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, spokesmen of the various peoples who wanted independence followed the leaders of the victorious Allies to Paris in 1919. Along with the Indians, the Koreans, the Irish, and the Arabs, Ho Chi Minh came with a list of Vietnamese grievances and a plea for Vietnamese autonomy. He arrived at Versailles in rented evening clothes to deliver his appeal. But the statesmen assembled in Paris had no time for the problems of the subject peoples of the French Empire, and nothing came of it." 4/

This was Ho's last major fling at non-communist nationalism before 1920, since increasingly he began to move in the circles of Leon Blum, Marcel Cochin, Marius Moutet, and other left-wing political figures, and became a member of the French Socialist Party. In May, 1920, Ho was a delegate at the Socialist Congress in Tours, and joined in the founding of the French Communist Party. Ho much later in life recalled those days in describing "The Path Which Led Me To Leninism."\*

"After World War I, I made my living in Paris, now as a retoucher at a photographer's, now as painter of 'Chinese antiquities' (made in France!). I would distribute leaflets denouncing the crimes committed by the French colonialists in Viet-Nam.

"At that time, I supported the October Revolution only instinctively, not yet grasping all its historic importance. I loved and admired Lenin because he was a great patriot who liberated his compatriots; until then, I had read none of his books.

"The reason for my joining the French Socialist Party was that these 'ladies and gentlemen' -- as I called my comrades at that moment -- had shown their sympathy toward me, toward the struggle of the oppressed peoples. But I understood neither what was a party, a trade-union, nor what was Socialism or Communism.

"Heated discussions were then taking place in the branches of the Socialist Party, about the question of whether the Socialist Party should remain in the Second International, should a Second-and-a-half International be founded, or should the Socialist Party join Lenin's Third International? I attended the meetings regularly, twice or thrice a week, and attentively listened to the discussions. First, I could not understand thoroughly.

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\*Article written in April, 1960, for the Soviet review Problems of the East, for the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth. From Fall, Ho on Revolution, 5-7.



Why were the discussions so heated? Either with the Second, Second-and-a-half, or Third International, the revolution could be waged. What was the use of arguing then? As for the First International, what had become of it?

"What I wanted most to know -- and this precisely was not debated in the meetings -- was: Which International sides with the peoples of colonial countries?

"I raised this question -- the most important in my opinion -- in a meeting. Some comrades answered: It is the Third, not the Second, International. And a comrade gave me Lenin's 'Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions,' published by l'Humanite, to read.

"There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness, and confidence it instilled into me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted aloud as if addressing large crowds: 'Dear martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!'

"After then, I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International.

"Formerly, during the meetings of the Party branch, I only listened to the discussion; I had a vague belief that all were logical, and could not differentiate as to who were right and who were wrong. But from then on, I also plunged into the debates and discussed with fervor. Though I was still lacking French words to express all my thoughts, I smashed the allegations attacking Lenin and the Third International with no less vigor. My only argument was: 'If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with the colonial people, what kind of revolution are you waging?'

"Not only did I take part in the meetings of my own Party branch, but I also went to other Party branches to lay down 'my position.' Now I must tell again that Comrades Marcel Cachin, Vaillant Couturier, Monmousseau, and many others helped me to broaden my knowledge. Finally, at the Tours Congress, I voted with them for our joining the Third International.

"At first, patriotism, not yet Communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.

"There is a legend, in our country as well as in China, on the miraculous 'Book of the Wise.' When facing great difficulties, one opens it and finds a way out. Leninism is not only a miraculous 'book of the wise,' a compass for us Vietnamese revolutionaries and people: it is also the radiant sun illuminating our path to final victory, to Socialism and Communism."

## 2. Comintern Agent

Later in 1920 Ho Chi Minh also attended the Baku Conference (First Conference of the Peoples of the Far East) on his first visit to Russia. It is also likely that he took part in the Conference of Workers of the Far East in 1922 in Moscow which was concerned with establishing communism in the Far East. He returned to France and

"Ho Chi Minh stayed on in France until 1923, when the French Communist Party chose him as its delegate to the Congress of the Peasant International (the Krestintern) which met in Moscow that October...he did not leave the Soviet Union after the meeting, but remained there for more than a year, studying Communism, its techniques, and its organization, first-hand. He came to know many of Communism's great and near-great during this period, as before he had come to know the leaders of the Left-Wing movement in Paris." 5/

In 1924, Ho became a student at the Eastern Workers University and studied Marxism-Leninism and bolshevik tactics. 6/

In 1925, he accompanied Michael Borodin, the Comintern delegate to the Kuomintang to Canton, China, as a Chinese translator to the Soviet consulate. After a few months, Ho had organized the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Young Comrades. 7/ The Whampoa Political and Military Academy in Canton, which had attracted revolutionaries, especially Vietnamese, was the center of Ho's training program of revolution and Marxism. Ho is alleged to have displayed political ruthlessness in exposing a rival nationalist, Pham Boi Chau, a renowned Vietnamese patriot and idealist; Ho is supposed to have received 100,000 piasters from the security police for his betrayal. Ho also set up a personnel security system which reputedly impaired other Vietnamese nationalist organizations. He and his assistant, one Lam Duc Thu, required two photographs of each incoming recruit to Whampoa Academy. Upon graduation, if the student had joined Ho's Youth League, he returned to Vietnam in secrecy. If the student displayed interest in other parties, Thu sold his photograph to the French consulate, which would then have the student arrested at the border. Thus Ho strengthened his own secret cells, while weakening his nationalist opposition. 8/ At Whampoa in 1926 Ho wrote that "only a communist party can [ultimately] insure the well-being of Annam." 9/



In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek broke with the communists, and Borodin was forced to return to Moscow. Ho Chi Minh returned to Moscow with him, but before departing turned over leadership of the Youth League to a trusted assistant who was arrested within the year. The League leadership then fell to Thu, who was still living sumptuously in Hong Kong on French blood money. Thu called a congress in Hong Kong in 1929 which resulted in the Vietnam delegates walking out in disgust, and forming an Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in Tonkin. The émigré leadership of the League conceded the necessity of organizing a communist party, but in reality, was unwilling to deviate from the political line set by Ho Chi Minh -- which was to build a revolutionary nationalist party with socialist tendencies. 10/ As the ICP grew in strength, the Youth League adopted the name "Annamese Communist Party."

After leaving China in 1927, Ho Chi Minh travelled to Moscow, Berlin, and in 1929 was in Thailand working secretly with 30,000 Viet émigrés. Ho returned to Hong Kong in January, 1930, and resolved the disunity among the several Indochinese Communist factions. A new party was set up, with a central committee at Haiphong, named the Vietnam Communist Party. In October, 1930, at Comintern insistence, it was renamed the Indochinese Communist Party, to include Cambodian and Laotians; the Central Committee was transferred to Saigon. 11/ French police repression of communists shortly after nearly destroyed the organization; a number of Ho's lieutenants, Pham van Dong, Giap and others, were sent to Poulo Candou for long prison terms.

### 3. Prison and Obscurity

Ho, who had been sentenced to death in absentia by the French, was arrested in Hong Kong in 1931 by the British. Bernard Fall wrote this account:

"Legality, however, prevailed in the genteel world of Hong Kong's Anglo-Saxon law. Defended by Sir Stafford Cripps before Britain's Privy Court, Ho was found not subject to extradition since he was a political refugee. Still, the British did not want him and he was a marked man. He slipped out of Hong Kong, into the nearby but isolated Chinese province of Fukien.

"Somehow, only a year later, Ho was in Shanghai, the only foreign place in Asia then where a substantial Vietnamese community could be found. He was desperately seeking contact with the Comintern apparatus, which was now prudently concealing its operations in China. It was understandable that what was left of the Chinese Communist Party outside of Mao's forces was not about to advertise its presence all over Shanghai. But there may have been another reason as well for Ho's difficulties in making contact with the Communists: Ho had been released from British prison for reasons which a suspicious Communist might find difficult to swallow. To a Communist apparatus emerging from the blows it had been subjected to in the early Thirties, it was normal procedure to isolate Ho Chi Minh as a potential

agent provocateur until more was known about what he had said and done while in British custody.

"Finally, Ho made contact and early in 1934 the Communist apparatus smuggled him back to Moscow, where he had been preceded by a fairly large group of Vietnamese trainees studying in many fields, from engineering to plain agitprop (agitation and propaganda). He naturally turned to the latter.

"Ho first attended the Institute for National and Colonial Questions in Moscow, and then the famous 'graduate school' for senior Communist leaders, the Lenin School. Moscow, in 1935-38, also provided an education of a far different sort: the Stalin purges. It would be interesting to know what Ho's feelings were as he saw some of his best friends accused, convicted, and executed for crimes which they patently had not committed. What is remarkable is that Ho, as a well-known member of the Comintern group, was not purged right along with them, for hundreds of thousands of people of lesser distinction than he became victims of Stalin's mania." 12/

The record of Ho's travels in the period of 1933-1939 is otherwise obscure; the communist movement in Vietnam was led by Tran Van Giau and others during those years.

Ho emerged from his retreats in 1939, a difficult year. Ho, as a disciplined communist had to follow the Party's tactical guidance, which was intended to safeguard the Soviet Union as the base of the international movement, even when this brought him into temporary conflict with his long term goals for Vietnam. Of the period just preceding World War II, Fall has written:

"...Ho probably was then unconditionally loyal to Stalin, and Stalin knew it. This became particularly clear when Nazism began to loom as a threat and the Communist parties decided in 1936 to apply the policy of 'popular fronts' with the Western democracies.

"This policy was a bitter pill for the colonial Communist governments such as that of Indochina, for it meant giving up advocacy of outright independence in favor of a policy of cooperation with the French colonial regime. But Ho, returning to Communist bases in Northwest China in 1937, gritted his teeth and rammed this line down the throat of his reluctant following in its most minute vagaries, and his report on the results, addressed to the Comintern in 1939, demonstrated his success.

"It was probably Ho's lowest point. He had to forswear publicly all he had stood for, had to cooperate with the French, the people he hated most, and had to sell out the Trotskyist



allies who had helped the Communists from time to time in beating French-sponsored candidates for elections in CochinChina (a French colony, then part of the Federation of Indochina which, as a protectorate, enjoyed a measure of legislative representation). And the worst was not yet over. Not authorized by the Comintern to expose himself through a premature return to Vietnam, he now worked only as a low-level communications operator to the Chinese Communist 8th Route Army, then fighting the Japanese." 13/

#### 4. Wartime Leader

In 1940 Ho was reported in Liuchow, Kwang-Si Province, South China, engaged in training guerrillas under the sponsorship of the local warlord. Shortly thereafter Ho, with the remnants of the central committee of the ICP, crossed into Vietnam, and in 1941 began organizing a resistance movement on a large scale. The ICP prepared for, and advocated, armed insurrection against French Imperialism and Japanese Fascism. However, Ho Chi Minh organized the Viet Minh as a Vietnamese nationalist movement of resistance. The Viet Minh program centered on collaboration with the Allies to defeat Japan and liberate Indochina. In the course of his work, Ho was arrested in May 1942 by Chinese nationalists, under mysterious circumstances, and in June 1943 was as mysteriously released. Ho re-joined the Viet Minh, re-entered Vietnam, and led the Viet Minh to power in August, 1945.

Ho, at the time he became President of the DRV, was undoubtedly a communist in the sense that he had spent twenty-five years in the embrace of Party discipline and doctrine, and that he had been an agent of the Communist International. He was also a dedicated revolutionary nationalist whose cause had exacted of him years of hardship, imprisonment, exile, and conspiratorial isolation. In his Notes from a Prison Diary, he wrote:

"People who come out of prison can build up a country.  
Misfortune is a test of people's fidelity.  
Those who protest at injustice are people of true merit.  
When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out." 14/

#### 5. Head of State

Whatever else he was, Ho was a leader and organizer par excellence, an astute manipulator of men who had successfully threaded a way through the tangle of international intrigue in China to political power for himself and his followers of the ICP and the Viet Minh. He came to power in North Vietnam under the aegis of the Allies, and by popular acclaim. He did not establish a communist government, although besides himself in the Presidency, he had arranged that communist lieutenants would hold the portfolios of interior, national defense, finance, propaganda, education, and youth. The communists, although thus centrally placed, were in a minority, and full account had been taken of independents and several of the principal

non-communist nationalist parties in determining representation on the cabinet. 15/

In November, 1945, Ho disestablished the Indochinese Communist Party; and Association for Marxist Studies was formed when the ICP was abolished, but it was not until 1951 that the Communist Party again asserted itself openly in DRV politics. 16/ Ho ostensibly threw his entire energies into the Viet Minh, which he described in 1945 as having:

"...millions of members from all social strata: intellectuals, peasants, workers, businessmen, soldiers, and from all nationalities in the country..." 17/

Subsequently, he moved to cut down the number of communists in cabinet posts within the government, and otherwise to enhance its coalition nature.

Ho, the Viet Minh, and the DRV government stressed their identity with the people, and their patriotic, democratic and nationalist goals, foregoing communist cant. Ho's own writings of the period are to point: 18/

"October, 1945: We must realize that all Government organs, from the Central to the Communal level, are the people's servants, that is to say they are appointed to work for the sake of the whole peoples interests.

"October, 1945: We neither dislike nor hate the French people. On the contrary, we respect them as a great people who were first to propagate the lofty ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

"November, 1945: The colonialists...have run counter to the promises concerning democracy and liberty that the Allied powers have proclaimed. They have of their own accord sabotaged their fathers' principles of liberty and equality. In consequence, it is for a just cause, for justice of the world, and for Vietnam's land and people that our compatriots throughout the country have risen to struggle, and are firmly determined to maintain their independence.

"January, 1946: With a view to winning complete independence and bringing about a close cooperation between the various political parties to further strengthen the Government, it is now named the Provisional Coalition Government. At this moment, if all parties unite together, the Government can overcome difficulties.

Political Objectives: To carry out satisfactorily the elections...to unify the various administrative organs according to democratic principles.

Economic Objectives: To endeavor to develop agriculture; to encourage cultivation and stock breeding in order to check famine.



Military Objectives: To unify the various armed forces...

"October 1946: We must show to the French Government and people and to the world at large that the Vietnamese people are already in possession of all the required conditions to be independent and free, and that recognition of our freedom and independence is a necessity...

"December 1946: Compatriots! Rise up! Men and women, old and young, regardless of creeds, political parties, or nationalities, all the Vietnamese must stand up to fight the French colonialists to save the Fatherland...

"April 1948: The nation has its roots in the people. In the Resistance War and national reconstruction, the main force lies in the people..."

#### 6. Ho, Again the Nationalist

The sincerity of Ho's nationalism, then and since, seems as beyond question as that of Stalin, or Harry Truman. Among his countrymen, Ho was preeminent among all nationalists. Ho had led the forces which welcomed the Allies as they entered Indochina to accept the surrender of Japanese forces there; Ho headed the DRV in 1945-1946 when national unity, independence, and peace seemed close at hand. Ho was popular, respected, even revered. He cultivated an image calculated to appeal to the peasant: venerable age, rustic austerity, and humility. He insisted on "Uncle Ho" in introducing himself, and it was an "Uncle Ho" that the countryside came to regard him. No other Vietnamese was so widely known, or so universally respected. 19/ Moreover, unlike any of his competitors, he had at his service a disciplined political organization of national scope, trained in the arts of revolution, and skilled in the techniques of mobilizing opinion and stimulating political action. In truth, then, Ho was, to the extent that such existed in 1945 or 1946, the embodiment of Vietnamese nationalism. 20/

The historical problem, of course, is to what extent Ho's nationalist goals might have modified his communist convictions. To many observers of the day, Ho seemed to place the former above the latter not solely as a matter of dissemblance, as he might have done in the simultaneous dissolution of the Party and the formation of the Marxist Association, but as a result of deeply held doubts about the validity of communism as a political form suitable for Vietnam. Sainteny who negotiated the 6 March 1946 Accord with Ho for France wrote that: "His proposals, his actions, his attitude, his real or assumed personality, all tended to convince that he found a solution by force repugnant..." Bao Dai is reputed to have said that: "I saw Ho Chi Minh suffer. He was fighting a battle within himself. Ho had his own struggle. He realized communism was not best for his country, but it was too late. Ultimately, he could not overcome his allegiance to communism." 21/ During the negotiations for a modus vivendi with the

French in Paris in autumn, 1946, Ho appealed to the French to "save him from the extremists" within the Viet Minh by some meaningful concession to Vietnamese independence. 22/ In reply to a journalist's inquiry, Ho claimed that he could remain neutral, "like Switzerland" in the developing world power struggle between communism and the West. 23/

#### 7. U.S. Perceptions of Ho

Personally, Ho was charming, and he was especially captivating with Americans. Ho's public statements resonated well with the anti-colonial sentiments of most Americans, and he presented an appealing figure, fragile, humble, ascetic, yet humorous and cosmopolitan. 24/ General Gallagher, who was the senior U.S. officer in contact with Ho in 1945, was impressed with Ho's resoluteness and nationalist dedication. Upon his return, he told State Department officials that "Ho was willing to cooperate with Great Britain, USSR, or the United States and would perhaps even settle for French tutelage if that were subordinated to control by other nations."

"Asked how 'communist' the Viet Minh were, General Gallagher replied that they were smart and successfully gave the impression of not being communist. Rather, they emphasized their interest in independence and their interest in independence and their Annamese patriotism. Their excellent organization and propaganda techniques, General Gallagher pointed out, would seem to have the earmarks of some Russian influence. General Gallagher stated that the minority Cao Dai group were definitely Communist. In his opinion, however, the Viet Minh should not be labeled full-fledged doctrinaire communist." \*

On 11 September, 1946, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris reported a visit from Ho:

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\* From Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Richard L. Sharp, of the Division of Southeast Affairs, Department of State, dated January 30, 1946.



"I have the honor to report that at his request, I received a visit this morning from M. Ho Chi-minh, 'President of the Republic of Viet-Nam', who confirmed the news published in the local press that the Fontainebleau negotiations between the Viet-Nam representatives and the French representatives have practically broken down and the Viet-Nam delegation will be returning to Indochina within the next few days....He said that he and his party aspired to Viet-Nam 'independence' in an 'Union Francaise'. He said that they would like to receive some 'help' from us, but did not specify what he meant by that. He took occasion to say that he was not a communist.

"From the general fuzziness of his remarks, I gathered that he would like us to get into the game and he would be very pleased if he could use us in some way or other in his future negotiations with the French authorities.

"I expressed our interest in Indochina and the people of Indochina but made no commitments." 25/  
[underlining added]

Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, for one, was not altogether persuaded by Ho's representations. In December, 1946, he cabled a U.S. diplomat in Hanoi the following instructions:

"Assume you will see Ho in Hanoi and offer following summary our present thinking as guide.

"Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam. Report fully, repeating or requesting DEPT repeat Paris...."

"If Ho takes stand non-implementation promise by French of Cochinchina referendum relieves Vietnam responsibility compliance with agreements, you might if you consider advisable raise question whether he believes referendum after such

long disorder could produce worthwhile result and whether he considers compromise on status Cochinchina could possibly be reached through negotiation.

"May say American people have welcomed attainments Indochinese in efforts realize praiseworthy aspirations greater autonomy in framework democratic institutions and it would be regrettable should this interest and sympathy be imperilled by any tendency Vietnam administration force issues by intransigence and violence.

"May inform Ho [U.S. Ambassador, Paris] discussing situation French similar frankness....

"Avoid impression US Govt making formal intervention this juncture. Publicity any kind would be unfortunate." 26/

In response to Under Secretary Acheson's telegram, the following was reported to Washington on December 17, 1946 -- just before the outbreak of hostilities in Hanoi:

"After conversations with French and Vietnamese officials and British, Chinese and US Consuls Hanoi Mr. Abbot Moffat, who is at present in SEA, has developed views in which Consul Saigon concurs along the following lines:

"The Vietnam Government is in control of a small Communist group possibly in indirect touch with Moscow and direct touch with Yenan. A nationalist group is utilizing Communist party techniques and discipline with which they are familiar. The people are conservative landowners and attempts to communize the country are secondary and would await successful operation of a nationalist state. Apparently some leaders, like Ho Chi Minh, consider collaboration with the French essential; those like Giap (Vo Nguyen Giap, Minister of National Defense) would avoid collaboration fearing French domination but might not reject French influence and aid. Nationalist sentiment runs deep among the Vietnamese and does opposition to the French, and they might easily turn against all whites. French influence is important not only as an antidote to Soviet influence but to protect Vietnam and SEA from future Chinese imperialism. Delay in achieving a settlement will progressively diminish the possibility of ultimate French influence.



"The honesty of both French and Vietnamese officials is questionable in connection with recent incidents. O'Sullivan (U.S. Vice-Consul, Hanoi) believes the Vietnamese were responsible for the November 20 incident, but it seems clear that with a different French commander at Haiphong than Colonel Debes, who is notorious for graft and brutality and who has admitted that he cannot control his own troops, the trouble might have been confined to the original incidents.

"According to the French, the Vietnamese enlarge their claims after each agreement and are so impractical and doctrinaire that all conversations are ineffectual. The Vietnamese feel that the French renege on each agreement and are trying to reestablish control. However, both say they have approximately the same objectives, although Giap says Vietnam opposes a political Indochinese federation but favors a federation dealing with common economic problems. Moffat has mentioned to the French three apparent basic troubles: (a) complete mutual distrust, (b) failure of the French to resolve their own views on 'free state within French Union', (c) almost childish Vietnamese attitude and knowledge of economic questions and vague groping for 'independence'. Agreement cannot be reached by trying to reach accords on incidental problems. Basic Vietnam powers and relations with France must first be established. Not only new faces are needed but neutral good offices or even mediation may be essential." \*

The U.S. official position remained essentially unchanged thereafter. A few months later, after fighting broke out in North Vietnam, Secretary of State Marshall stated that:

"Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this

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\* U.S. Department of State Telegram, from Washington, 17 December 1946.

trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin. Fact does remain, however, that a situation does exist in Indochina which can no longer be considered, if it ever was considered, to be of a local character. 27/

In May, 1949, Dean Acheson, then Secretary of State, instructed the U.S. representative in Hanoi to warn Vietnamese nationalists against any acceptance of a coalition with Ho and the Viet Minh:

"...You may take following line as representing consensus informed Americans:

"In light Ho's known background, no other assumptions possible but that he outright Commie so long as (1) he fails unequivocally repudiate Moscow connections and Commie doctrine and (2) remains personally singled out for praise by internat'l Commie press and receives its support. Moreover, US not impressed by nationalist character red flag with yellow stars. Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement nat'l aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even slightest deviation. On basis examples eastern Eur it must be assumed such wld be goal Ho and men his stamp if included Baodai Govt. To include them in order achieve reconciliation opposing polit elements and QTE national unity UNQTE wld merely postpone settlement issue whether Vietnam to be independent nation or Commie satellite until circumstances probably even less favorable nationalists than now. It must of course be conceded theoretical possibility exists estab National Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any



area beyond reach Soviet army. However, US attitude cld take acct such possibility only if every other possible avenue closed to preservation area from Kremlin control. Moreover, while Vietnam out of reach Soviet army it will doubtless be by no means out of reach Chi Commie hatchet men and armed forces. 28/

#### 8. Ho, Asian Neutral?

Ho may indeed have never been other than a crafty Leninist, seeking a passing accommodation with the French or the U.S. while he gathered strength. His word and deed after 1949 support such a construction: In January 1950, the DRV declared itself to be the "only lawful government of the entire Vietnamese people," 29/ joined the Sino-Soviet Bloc, and began attacks on the U.S. "imperialists" and "interventionists." 30/ Early in 1951, the DRV legalized the Lao Dong Party, expressly communist. 31/

There remains, however, irresolvable doubt concerning Ho's earlier predilection for neutralism, or even a western affiliation. It can be said that, whatever Ho might have preferred, he was offered only narrow options. No reputable Westerner is known to have interviewed Ho face to face from an abortive French attempt in 1947 to negotiate a Cochinchina settlement through late 1954. 32/ Ho had no direct means of communication with the U.S. after 1946, and the signals he received from the U.S. could hardly have been encouraging. 33/ By 1947, U.S. military equipment had already been used by French and British forces against the Vietnamese, and the U.S. had arranged credit for French purchase of \$160 million worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for use in Indochina. 34/ Secretary of State George C. Marshall's January, 1947, public statement on Vietnam had been confined to a hope that "a pacific basis for adjustment of the difficulties could be found," 35/ and the Marshall Plan for Europe definitely threw U.S. resources behind France. But assurances from the Russians were not materially stronger. While the Soviets excoriated colonial powers other than France, potential imminence of a French Communist government muffled even their verbal backing of Ho, let alone recognition and aid. 36/

## 9. Ho, Realist

As a political realist, Ho must have been impressed that the DRV was as unlikely to rise in priority over France in U.S. foreign policy, as Vietnam was to assert claims on Soviet support over Russian preoccupation with Europe. In 1946 he put his plight in these terms: "We apparently stand quite alone; we shall have to depend on ourselves." 37/ After 1947, events conspired to alter Ho's isolation, for while prospects for U.S. support dimmed, and in 1950, vanished, Mao Tse Tung -- in whose service Ho had spent eight years -- was moving from triumph to triumph, and by late 1949, was in a position to render direct assistance to Ho across his northern border. 38/ Faced with an increasingly serious military threat, Ho gravitated quickly toward the Bloc. From Viet Minh jungle hideouts came blasts at the U.S. "Marshallization of the world," taking note that the Russians opposed "Marshallization." 39/ In 1949, after the U.S. had publicly welcomed the formation of Bao Dai's "new and unified state of Viet Nam," Ho sent delegates to a Peking conference where Liu Shao-Chi, in the keynote speech, declared that only the Communist Party could lead a "national liberation movement." 40/ Ho and Mao exchanged messages of amity, and neutralist Tito was taken under attack by the Viet Minh radio. In January, 1950, in response to Ho's declaration that the DRV was Vietnam's only legitimate government, Mao tendered formal recognition, and Stalin's followed immediately thereafter. 41/ The die was cast: U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared in February, 1950, that these recognitions "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina." 42/ Ho responded in August, 1950, to the first shipments of U.S. aid to French forces in Vietnam in the following sharp language.

"Since the beginning of the war the Americans have tried to help the French bandits. But now they have advanced one more step to direct intervention in Viet Nam. Thus we have now one principal opponent -- the French bandits -- and one more opponent -- the American interventionists....

"On our side, a few years of resistance have brought our country the greatest success in the history of Viet Nam -- recognition of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as an equal in the world democratic family by the two biggest countries in the world -- the Soviet Union and democratic China -- and by the new democratic countries. That means that we are definitely on the democratic side and belong to the anti-imperialist bloc of 800 million people." 43/



10. Ho Chi Minh Chronology

- 1890 On 19 May born Nguyen Van Thanh, youngest son of three children of Nguyen Tat Sac, a minor government official and revolutionary, in Kim Lien Village, Nghe An Province, Annam (Central Vietnam).
- 1895 Attended village school and French lycee at Vinh (14 miles from Kim Lien). Carried messages for anti-French underground. Noted for his political tirades (Fall).
- 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. Japanese victory greatly influenced Vietnamese political developments.)
- 1905 Dismissed from school for reasons of politics (NVN historians), or poor grades (teachers).
- 1906-1910 Transferred to Lycee Quoc Hoc, a prestigious high school, in Hue. Quoc Hoc was a hotbed of Vietnamese resistance to outside influence; among its graduates were Ngo Dinh Diem, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Pham van Dong. (To this day, the students of Hue continue to strongly influence Vietnamese politics, e.g., Hue riots against Ky in 1966.)
- 1910-1911 Left school without a diploma; taught school at Lycee Dac-Thanh in Phan-Thiet. Left Phan Thiet in October to attend trade school (probably cooks and bakers) in Saigon.
- 1912 Worked as messboy aboard French liner SS Le Touche-Treville on Saigon-Marseille run. Ho carried letter of introduction to Phan Chu Trinh, prison mate of Ho's father at Poulo Condore and veteran nationalist of Dong Bao (Haircutters) movement in 1907. Failing to accept Trinh's nationalism, Ho returned to working on liners travelling the world.
- 1913 Worked in kitchens of Carlton Hotel in London under Escoffier, famous French chef. Joined Overseas Workers Union, a clandestine anti-colonialist group dominated by Chinese.
- 1914 ) (1914-1916 is an obscure period -- sometime during the period  
1915 ) Ho went back to sea and visited New York, later writing on the  
1916 ) U.S. race problem in La Race Noire.)
- 1917 Ho turned up in Paris, France, to spread influence of anti-colonialist nationalism to Indochinese conscripted for war service in France. Communist revolution in Russia under Lenin which promised national independence for colonials stimulated Ho to deeper involvement in politics.
- 1918 Conducted a photograph retouching business and advertised in Socialist Party's newspaper under the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc (The Patriot).

- 1919 (A Vietnamese sailor, Ton Duc Thang, mutinied with another communist to turn over a French ship to Russia. Thang was imprisoned at Poulo Condore and today is Ho's Vice President in North Vietnam.) Ho prepared a 8-point program of colonial grievances to present to the Versailles Peace Conference, but his offerings were rejected.
- 1920 Attended Baku Conference (First Conference of the Peoples of the Far East) on first visit to USSR. On return to France, Ho attended 18th National Congress of the Socialist Party as an Indochinese Delegate in December. There he opted for the Third International over the Second, because of the latter's position against colonialism, and thus became a founding member of the French Communist Party (PCF).
- 1921 Organized "Union Intercoloniale"-- started as a "front" to attract members to the Party from colonial territories -- which published periodical La Paria; edited Viet Nam Hon (Soul of Vietnam) which was smuggled to Indochina.
- 1922 Attended first Comintern-sponsored conclave (Conference of the Workers of the Far East) devoted to communist organization of the Far East in Moscow.
- 1923 Left France in June to attend several congresses of Kresintern (Peasants International) in Moscow as a PCF delegate in October. Lived in USSR for 18 months as colonial representative on Kresintern permanent directing committee.
- 1924 In Moscow Ho attended Eastern Workers' University and served on Kresintern.
- 1925 Assigned to Soviet consulate at Canton under Michael Borodin as "Chinese translator" -- a cover for organizing Indochina Communist Party into communist groups. Launched Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Cach Merh Thanh Nien Hoi), a training school for Indochinese students and emigres, in June. Ho published a brochure Le Proces de la Colonisation Francaise which was carried into Vietnam and became the student "nationalist" bible. Also in June, Ho is alleged to have betrayed Phan Boi Chau, a prominent Vietnamese nationalist leader, progenitor of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD), to the French security police. Ho's intent said to be desire for martyr to produce a surge of patriotic sentiment for revolution in Annam -- which it did.
- 1926 Translated Marxist terminology into Sino-Annamite. Stated that "only a communist party can insure the well-being of Annam." Selected members of Ho's youth organization were enrolled in Whampoa Military Academy, where Chinese nationalists and communists were trained as future leaders for Kuomintang.



Conspired to betray Vietnamese "nationalist" students who did not join his Youth League at Whampoa.

1927. Departed Canton in April with Borodin after break between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao's communists. In Hong Kong transferred leadership of Youth League.
- 1928 Attended Communist Congress Against Imperialism at Brussels. Travelled to Thailand, and there often disguised himself as a Buddhist monk. Acted as an agent of Third International.
- 1929 In July, Ho worked in a colony of Vietnamese emigres numbering 30,000 in Thailand. Organized Annamite Fraternity of Siam (Hoi.Than Ai Nguoi Annam O Xiem). Ordered to Hong Kong to organize Indochina Communist Party. His own Youth League the previous May had split into two factions -- one called "Indochinese Communist Party"; the other, later, the Annamese Communist Party.
- 1930 Ho arrived in Hong Kong in January. Fused Indochinese Communist Party, Annamese Communist Party and Indochinese Communist Alliance into Vietnam Communist Party (Viet Nam Cong San Dang) by March. Central Committee transferred to Haiphong. In October, per Comintern wishes, adopted new name of Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang). Ho attended Third Conference of the South Seas Communist Party in Singapore in April. French sentenced Ho Chi Minh to death in absentia, probably as a result of the aftermath of the Yen Bay insurrection in February.
- 1931 Arrested by British in Hong Kong and imprisoned in June. British acted on French pressure which was suppressing communist/nationalist unrest in Vietnam at the time. Entire apparatus of Indochinese Communist Party was smashed.
- 1932 After series of trials in British courts (including appeal on Ho's behalf by Sir Stafford Cripps in England), Ho was released from Hong Kong Prison in late 1932. Went to Singapore, arrested again and sent back to Hong Kong. Admitted to hospital for tuberculosis.
- 1933 Nguyen Ai Quoc reported dead in Hong Kong by French records. Disappeared without a trace. Believed he was released to work secretly for British Intelligence Service.  
(Congress of ICP held in Ban-Mai, Thailand in April.)  
(Attempts to reconstitute ICP were under leadership of Tran van Giau, who had studied at Moscow's Oriental Institute.)

- 1934 Ho returned to Moscow in early 1934 for attendance at political schools. First attended Institute for National and Political Questions in Moscow. Later attended "graduate school" for senior communist leaders, the Lenin School.  
(Stalin purges 1935-1938 did not involve Ho. Apparently, unconditionally loyal to Stalin, Ho had to adopt new party line of "popular front" as a result of emerging Nazism.)
- 1935 Moscow schools.
- 1936 Moscow schools.
- 1937 With Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army in China. Also located in Kunming at one time.
- 1938 With Eighth Route Army as communications operator. (Popular Front collapsed in France.)
- 1939 (French Communist Party dissolved in September at outbreak of World War II.) Ho addressed report to Comintern on success of "popular front" policy in Far East. ICP Central Committee at November congress adopted new Comintern "anti-war" line of Stalin-Hitler pact.
- 1940 In late 1940, Ho was Political Commissar of a Chinese Communist guerrilla training mission under General Yeh Chien-ying training nationalists at Liuchow, Kwang-Si Province.  
(In June, France fell to Hitler.)  
Ho headed external directing Bureau of ICP in Kunming, China, in September.  
(French crushed Saigon insurrection of ICP, 22 November 1940. Numerous arrests followed.)
- 1941 Ho turned up in Moscow, and thence travelled to Yenan with Nguyen Khanh Toan, Vietnamese teacher at Moscow University. Crossed into Vietnam at Cao Bang Province in February. Organized Viet Minh (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi) on 19 May, as a "united front" group of Vietnamese nationalists in China. Organized resistance movement in northern Tonkin.
- 1942 Ho was arrested by Chinese warlord on August 28 as a French spy (and jailed for 13 months) after crossing border into China to make contact with Chinese and emigre groups.  
(October 10, the KMT-controlled Vietnam Revolutionary League -- Dong Minh Hoi -- was recognized by Chinese Marshal Chang Fa-kuei.)
- 1943 In prison until 16 September, Ho was released to gather information on Japanese troop movements in Indochina for Chinese.



Adopted the name "Ho Chi Minh" (He Who Enlightens). Still leader of Viet Minh, Ho became a member of Central Committee -- and temporary Chairman -- of Dong Minh Hoi (Vietnam Revolutionary League). Both groups received support from China and U.S. Ho returned to Tonkin clandestinely, devoting efforts to the Viet Minh.

1944 Ho operated in the jungles in North Vietnam. He constantly sought aid from the U.S. through the O.S.S.

1945 May 1945 established liberated zone of six provinces in Tonkin and was visited by U.S. officer of O.S.S. In June, Ho called for National Congress, but convening was postponed to August 16 at Tan Trao. Viet Minh program:

- (1) disarm Japs before Allied entry
- (2) wrest power from enemy
- (3) be in authority to receive Allied forces.

August 19, Governor fled, Bao Dai abdicated, and few days later National Liberation Committee proclaimed "provisional government" with Ho Chi Minh president.

September 2, Ho Chi Minh declared independence of Vietnam Democratic Republic.

(British land in Saigon-Chinese enter Hanoi.)

On November 11, Ho dissolved ICP and formed Marxist Study Group. Ho wrote to President Truman in October and November.

1946 Appealed to U.S., U.K. USSR and China in February. Wrote letters to President Truman on 16 and 18 February.

Ho formed "coalition" government under Chinese occupation on March 2, 1946. Exercised personal prestige to gain acceptance 6 March 1946 Agreement providing for French replacement of Chinese in Tonkin.

Ho at Dalat Conference in May, and Fontainebleau, France, in August, failed to produce negotiated settlement of differences with French. On 11 September, Ho told U.S. Ambassador Caffrey in Paris that he was not a communist. Ho signed modus vivendi on 14 September following breakdown of Fontainebleau talks, and returned to Hanoi.

French seized local government in Haiphong and Langson in November. DRV armed forces attacked French in Hanoi on 19 December 1946. Ho moved DRV government into mountains.

1947 On April 30, Ho relinquished the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his Socialist Under Secretary. Ho had Vietnam government reshuffled twice to form broadest coalition possible against French and to avoid "extremist" label by foreigners.

(French negotiated with Bao Dai to split resistance.)

- 1948 (Giap appointed Minister of National Defense by Ho.)
- 1949 In March, Ho denounced the charge of "Communist domination" of DRV as pure French imperialist propaganda.  
In interview by Franc-Tireur, Ho stated his ideology was "real unity and independence of our country."  
(Bao Dai established puppet government in July.)  
(Nationalist China falls to Mao Tse-tung; Chinese troops arrive on Sino-Tonkin border.)
- 1950 Ho appeals for international recognition of DRV.  
(Russia and China recognize DRV.)  
(On June 25, North Korea attacked South Korea.)



I. C. 3.

HO CHI MINH'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE U.S.  
1945-1946

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1945-1946Resumé

Ho's earliest representations to the United States were via the O.S.S. teams assigned to work with the Viet Minh. The Americans found Ho genial, and cooperative. One American officer subsequently reported his experiences with Ho to Robert Shaplen:

"There are many facets to the story of Ho's relations with the West during and after the Second World War. Let us start with the somewhat naive but at the same time revealing account of a former young lieutenant in the United States Army--I shall have to refer to him only as John--who in May, 1945, parachuted into Ho's jungle headquarters near the village of Kim Lung in northern Tonkin on a mission to establish an underground that would help Allied personnel escape to freedom. Kim Lung lies on the edge of a heavy rain forest, thickly underlaid by brush. Amid sugar-loaf formations of mountains lie tiny valleys, and it was in one of these, near a small stream half-way up a tall hill, that Ho Chi Minh's camp, consisting of four huts, lay sequestered. Each of the huts was twelve feet square, set four feet off the ground on bamboo stakes, and Ho's was as bare as the others.

"In this crude revolutionary cradle, deep in Japanese territory, John had the unique experience of living and working with Ho for several months. He found Ho completely co-operative in lending the support of his guerrillas for scouting and raiding parties, including one to rescue some French internees near the China border. John used his portable radio to put Ho in preliminary touch with French negotiators who were in Kunming, China, and who would soon be debating Indochina's postwar future with Ho in Hanoi, but John himself played a more immediate role in Vietnamese affairs by informally helping Ho frame a Declaration of Independence.

"He kept asking me if I could remember the language of our Declaration," John says. "I was a normal American, I couldn't. I could have wired up to Kunming and had a copy dropped to me, of course, but all he really wanted was the flavor of the thing. The more we discussed it, the more he actually seemed to know about it than I did. As a matter of fact, he knew more about almost everything than I did, but when I thought his demands were too stiff, I told him anyway. Strange thing was he listened. He was an awfully sweet guy.



If I had to pick out one quality about that little old man sitting on his hill in the jungle, it was his gentleness.'

"He and John exchanged toasts and shared stewed tiger livers. John now admits his naivete in being ready to believe that Ho was not a Communist. But even if he was, John felt certain that Ho was sincere in wanting to co-operate with the West, especially with France and the United States. Some of Ho's men impressed John less. 'They go charging around with great fervor shouting 'independence,' but seventy-five per cent of them don't know the meaning of the word,' he wrote in his diary. John still has two letters in English Ho sent him in the jungle. One of them, written soon after the Japanese surrender, when the Vietminh was about to seize control of the nationalist movement, reads as follows:

Dear Lt. [John],

I feel weaker since you left. Maybe I'd have to follow your advice--move to some other place where food is easy to get, to improve my health....

I'm sending you a bottle of wine, hope you like it..

Be so kind as to give me foreign news you got.

...Please be good enuf to send to your H.Q. the following wires.

1. Daiviet [an anti-Vietminh nationalist group] plans to exercise large terror against French and to push it upon shoulder of VML [Vietminh League]. VML ordered 2 millions members and all its population be watchful and stop Daiviet criminal plan when & if possible. VML declares before the world its aim is national independence. It fights with political & if necessary military means. But never resorts to criminal & dishonest act.

Signed--NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE  
OF VML

2. National Liberation Committee of VML begs U.S. authorities to inform United Nations the following. We were fighting Japs on the side of the United Nations. Now Japs surrendered. We beg United Nations to realize their solemn promise that all nationalities will be given democracy and independence. If United Nations forget their solemn promise & don't grant Indochina full independence, we will keep fighting until we get it.

Signed--LIBERATION COMMITTEE OF VML

Thank you for all the troubles I give you....Best greetings!

Yours sincerely, Hoo [sic]." \*

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\* Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 28-30.

Similar representations were conveyed to the U.S. via Vietnamese in Kunming (see the memorandum from General Donovan, Director of the O.S.S., inclosed).

In October, warfare between Vietnamese and French forces began in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh thereupon dispatched a series of communications to the U.S., to China, and to the other great powers, denying France's right to speak on behalf of Vietnam in the U.N. or other international forums, and denouncing its "aggression" in Vietnam. Ho, in a telegram on 17 October 1945, called President Truman's attention to the "facts" that establishment of the U.N. Far East Advisory Commission overlooked Vietnam membership, that France was not entitled to membership, and that the DRV qualified for nation status under the Atlantic Charter. Requesting the U.S. to convey his points to the United Nations, Ho threatened that absence of Vietnam would bring forth instability in the Far East. The telegram was referred from the White House to State which duly noted "SEA considers that no action should be taken...." Within a week, Ho Chi Minh appealed via Radio Hanoi to Truman, Attlee, and De Gaulle and stated that the "Annamite Nationalist Government" intended to hold a plebiscite to give a constitution to Indochina. (The French took the view that they were not opposed to Ho per se, but wanted assurance that Ho represented the entire population of Indochina.) Ho repeatedly referred to President Truman's Navy Day address on foreign policy of 27 October 1945, and pleaded for application of its principles to Vietnam and the DRV. In that speech, the President did not refer to Indochina in any fashion, but the following passage evidently stirred Ho's hopes:

"The foreign policy of the United States is based firmly on fundamental principles of righteousness and justice. In carrying out those principles we shall firmly adhere to what we believe to be right; and we shall not give our approval to any compromise with evil.

"But we know that we cannot attain perfection in this world overnight. We shall not let our search for perfection obstruct our steady progress toward international cooperation. We must be prepared to fulfill our responsibilities as best we can, within the framework of our fundamental principles, even though we recognize that we have to operate in an imperfect world.

"Let me restate the fundamentals of that foreign policy of the United States:

"1. We seek no territorial expansion or selfish advantage. We have no plans for aggression against any other state, large or small. We have no objective which need clash with the peaceful aims of any other nation.

"2. We believe in the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force.



"3. We shall approve no territorial changes in any friendly part of the world unless they accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned.

"4. We believe that all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source. That is true in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, as well as in the Western Hemisphere.

"5. By the combined and cooperative action of our war allies, we shall help the defeated enemy states establish peaceful democratic governments of their own free choice. And we shall try to attain a world in which Nazism, Fascism, and military aggression cannot exist.

"6. We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power. In some cases it may be impossible to prevent forceful imposition of such a government. But the United States will not recognize any such government.

"7. We believe that all nations should have the freedom of the seas and equal rights to the navigation of boundary rivers and waterways and of rivers and waterways which pass through more than one country.

"8. We believe that all states which are accepted in the society of nations should have access on equal terms to the trade and the raw materials of the world.

"9. We believe that the sovereign states of the Western Hemisphere, without interference from outside the Western Hemisphere, must work together as good neighbors in the solution of their common problems.

"10. We believe that full economic collaboration between all nations, great and small, is essential to the improvement of living conditions all over the world, and to the establishment of freedom from fear and freedom from want.

"11. We shall continue to strive to promote freedom of expression and freedom of religion throughout the peace-loving areas of the world.

"12. We are convinced that the preservation of peace between nations requires a United Nations Organization composed of all the peace-loving nations of the world who are willing jointly to use force if necessary to insure peace." \*

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\* Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Harry S. Truman, April-December 1945), 433-434.

Ho Chi Minh forwarded to the Secretary of State the D.R.V. Declaration of Independence, Bao Dai's abdication rescript, general DRV foreign policy declarations, and its expressed position on the war in South Vietnam. He cited the Atlantic Charter as the "foundation of future Vietnam" and the San Francisco Charter as eradicating colonial oppression. Ho appealed for "immediate interference" and submitted several requests -- the key one being that the United Nations should recognize the full independence of Vietnam. Again, in November, he made three points: (1) the French had ignored all treaties at the end of the war and attacked Saigon in September; (2) the Vietnamese people were willing to support the United Nations, but would fight any French troops coming into Vietnamese territory; and (3) any bloodshed would be the responsibility of the French. Two weeks later, Ho appealed to President Truman and UNRRA for assistance to combat starvation caused by flood, drought, and French conflict. Also in November, Ho wrote to the Secretary of State asking to establish cultural relations with the U.S. by sending fifty Vietnamese students to the U.S., and to complain of the absence of Vietnamese representation at the Washington Conference for the Far East. Prompted by Truman's appointment of General Marshall as special representative in China, early in 1946 Ho Chi Minh again appealed for direct intervention by the U.S. to provide an immediate solution of the Vietnamese issue. On 16 February 1946, a tone of irritation was introduced: Ho wrote once more to President Truman implying "complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies" in the French aggression; but still Ho pleaded with the U.S. to take a "decisive step" in support of Vietnamese independence asking only what had been "graciously granted to the Philippines." Ho then addressed an urgent broadcast appeal to the U.S., China, Russia, and Great Britain for "interference" by the Big Four to stop the bloodshed and to bring the Indochina issue before the United Nations.

It became abundantly clear, however, that the U.S. would do nothing to aid the Viet Minh. Assuming the sincerity of Ho Chi Minh's appeals, the most opportune time for the U.S. to have intervened in Vietnam passed in autumn, 1945, and prospects for U.S. action dimmed as DRV negotiations with the French proceeded in February-March 1946. Paradoxically, it was the possibility of communist accession to power in France that both added to Ho's incentive to negotiate with the French, and stimulated stronger U.S. support for France. Ultimately, the U.S. was deterred from backing Viet Minh anti-colonialism (though the U.S. pressured France for concessions to Viet nationalism) because its interests seemed more directly engaged in shoring up the French as a key part of its assistance to European recovery. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh continued to hope for a new France, breaking away from its old colonialist policies under a Socialist or Communist government.

Ho Chi Minh's correspondence with the U.S. ceased after the 6 March 1946 Accord with France, although Ho Chi Minh did visit the U.S. Embassy in Paris on 11 September 1946.



## Synopses

### Page

- August 22, 1945: Memorandum for the Secretary of State from the Director, O.S.S. Reports a liberal French attitude towards Indochina (based on assertions of Major Sainteny) and desire of Vietnamese for protectorate status under U.S. (based on assertions of Viet Minh and Dong Minh Hoi representatives)..... C-66
- September 29, 1945: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, to Secretary of State, dated October 18, 1945. Summarizes letter from Ho Chi Minh to President of U.S., expressing sympathy at the death of Colonel Peter Dewey, O.S.S. Commander in Saigon. Enjoins President to provide advance notice of movements of American nationals, but expresses appreciation for "U.S. stand for international justice and peace." ..... C-69
- October 17, 1945: Telegram, Ho Chi Minh to President Truman. Appeals for DRV membership on UN Advisory Commission for the Far East, citing Atlantic Charter to advance its claims to membership vice those of France..... C-71
- October 22, 1945: Letter, Ho Chi Minh to U.S. Secretary of State, calls for immediate interference by the UN. Appealing to the Atlantic Charter and the UN Charter, and warning of general warfare in Far East, Ho calls for UN action to interfere with France, including an "Inquiry Commission.".. C-80\*
- October 23, 1945: U.S. Ambassador in Paris reports newspaper reports of radio appeal of Ho to President Truman and other western leaders, announcing plan to hold plebescite. French government announces it would not oppose in principle such a plebescite if Ho Chi Minh represents all of Indochina and not merely Viet Minh..... C-75
- November 1, 1945: Letter from Ho Chi Minh to James Byrnes, Secretary of State, proposing to send a delegation of 50 Viet youths to the U.S. to promote friendly cultural relations and to study at U.S. universities..... C-90

- November 5, 1945: Despatch, Philip D. Sprouse, U.S. Consul, Kunming, to Secretary of State. Incloses 22 October letter of Ho, surveys situation in Vietnam based on reports of Colonel Nordlinger, USA, and reports Ho and Bao Dai attempt to visit Chiang Kai-shek..... C-76
- November 8, 1945: U.S. Embassy, Chungking summarizes Ho Chi Minh letter addressed to President Truman and Chiang Kai-shek underscoring French loss of sovereignty, DRV acquisition of same, and aggression by French to regain it. Asserts French bear onus of resuming war of aggression in Far East..... C-84
- November 23, 1945: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, paraphrases letters from Ho Chi Minh to President Truman and Director General of UNRRA, describing famine in North Vietnam, and appealing for relief..... C-87
- November 26, 1945: Despatch from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, inclosing Ho's letter of 1 November; letter of 28 October from Ho to Chiang Kai-shek urging Chiang to stop the British-French-Japanese action in Cochinchina; and an undated telegram to the Secretary of State protesting that France did not have the right to speak for Vietnam in international councils, and appealing to all free nations of the world to stop conflict in South Vietnam..... C-89
- January 18, 1946: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, dated 13 February 1946, paraphrasing letter from Ho to President Truman, dated 18 January 1946, reminding that peace is indivisible and requesting President's intervention for immediate resolution of Vietnam issue. Telegram describes identical letter to General Marshall, same date..... C-93
- February 16, 1946: Letter signed by Ho Chi Minh to President of the U.S. cites the principles supported by the U.S. before, during and after the war, and in the UN, to call for U.S. aid to Vietnam in the face of French aggression. Ho asks what has been granted the Philippines -- "like the Philippines our goal is full independence and full cooperation with the UNITED STATES." ..... C-95



- February 18, 1946: Note from the DRV to Governments of China, USA, USSR, and Great Britain, calls attention to Vichy-French collaboration with Japan in Indochina, and to policies which led to famine among the Vietnamese. Again on March 9, 1945, the French acceded to the Japanese seizure of power. By contrast, the Vietnamese resistance had fought the Japanese all through the years, and in August, 1945, ousted Nippon's regime, and founded the DRV. The DRV is based on principles enunciated by Sun Yat Sen and President Truman. Impressive progress has been achieved by the DRV in North Vietnam, but in South Vietnam, French aggression has obtruded. DRV urgently appeals for interference by allies to halt the conflict, and the placing of the Indochina issue before the UN..... C-98
- February 27, 1946: Telegram from Assistant Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State (Landon), to the Secretary of State, from Hanoi, received in Washington February 27. Summarizes state of negotiations between French (Sainteny) and DRV. Reports that Ho Chi Minh handed Landon two letters addressed to President of the U.S., asserting that Vietnamese will fight until UN intervenes in Vietnam. Requests U.S. support Vietnamese independence "according to Philippines example." ..... C-101
- September 11, 1946: Memorandum of conversation with Ho Chi Minh by the First Secretary, U.S. Embassy, Paris, dated September 12, 1946. Ho describes his O.S.S. contacts, denies having communist connections and indicates that he hoped to obtain aid from the United States. He refers specifically to economic aid, but hints at military and naval assistance, e.g., mentions the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay..... C-102

# OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

22 August 1945

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE:

The OSS representative in Kunming has transmitted the following information concerning the French attitude toward the Indo-Chinese Provisional Government. The Provisional Government was the subject of our two memoranda of 21 August.

The French Government has decided to adopt a passive diplomatic attitude toward the reoccupation of Indo-China because of their inability to make an entry with a powerful show of arms. A committee of three has been appointed by the French Government in Paris, composed of the chief of the Kunming DGER /French Intelligence Service/, the Minister of Colonies, and the Administrator General of Colonies. Its mission is to contact Annamite leaders and negotiate with them on terms favorable to the Indo-Chinese, according to Major Sainteny, who will represent the committee in Hanoi. The French policy will be one of liberal administration in the capacity of advisors to the Indo-Chinese Provisional Government, to be established by the Kuomintang Annamite and the Vietminh, which together form a committee of national liberation. (The Vietminh is a 100% Communist party, with a membership of approximately 20% of the active political native element. The Kuomintang Party comprises six minority parties and a score of independent ones.) The French Committee has been charged with the task of negotiating directly with Indo-Chinese leaders and deciding on the best modus operandi. It has full powers of signing treaties in the name of France. The committee will in turn report to Paris, which retains the prerogative of making minor amendments to the general agreement. Annamite leaders in Kunming and representatives of the Central Liberation Committee recently from Hanoi, have expressed a desire to bring Imgin /Annam?/ in Indo-China under the status of an American protectorate, and are hoping that the US will intercede with the United Nations for the exclusion of the French, as well as Chinese, from the reoccupation of Indo-China.



Well-informed French and Annamese sources state that the Central Committee has been negotiating with local Japanese military authorities for the purchase of guns and ammunition, with the intent of using them, should either the French or Chinese attempt to reoccupy their areas. The Indo-Chinese fear a Chinese reoccupation because they feel the Chinese will become squatters living off the land, pillaging, raping, and looting. The French concur in this opinion only in so far as to wish exclusive administrative rights for themselves. The leader of the Annamite Kuomintang Party in China and a direct representative of the Central Liberation Committee in Hanoi, made the following statement on 15 August:

"Should the French attempt to return to Indo-China with the intention of governing the country, and to act once more as oppressors, the Indo-Chinese people are prepared to fight to the end against any such reoccupation. On the other hand, if they came as friends to establish commerce, industry and without aspirations to governmental rule, they will be welcomed the same as any other foreign power. The Central Committee wishes to make known to the United States Government that the Indo-Chinese people first of all desire the independence of Indo-China, and are hoping that the United States, as a champion of democracy, will assist her in securing this independence in the following manner:

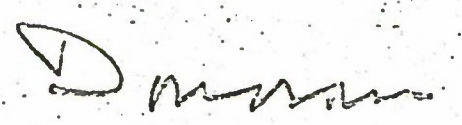
(1) Prohibiting, or not assisting the French to enter Indo-China; (2) keeping the Chinese under control, in order that looting and pillaging will be kept to a minimum; (3) sending technical advisors to assist the Indo-Chinese to exploit the resources of the land; and (4) developing those industries that Indo-China is capable of supporting.

"In conclusion, the Indo-Chinese would like to be placed on the same status as the Philippines for an undetermined period."

The French representative in Kunming, Major Sainteny, is now receiving material aid from the Section Liaison Francaise--Extreme Orient (SLFEO) Calcutta in making arrangements and readying personnel for the re-entry into Indo-China. His group were prepared to leave on the morning of 17 August. However, on arrival

at the airfield, they were confronted with Chinese and American military police posted about the plane, prohibiting them from leaving the airfield. In conversation later that day with Major Sainteny, he expressed the thought that the French had been betrayed by the Americans. He stated further that the Americans in China have right along been playing the Chinese game, although unwittingly. When questioned concerning his intentions from now on, he reluctantly stated there was nothing for the French to do but await instructions from Chungking. The French DGER in Kunming had infiltrated teams of men into Haiphong under the leadership of a Captain Blanchard. He has made contact with Lt. Col. Kamiya, former liaison officer between the Japanese military headquarters in Hanoi and Admiral Decoux' administration. Kamiya detained this team in Haiphong, confining their activities to transmitting messages concerning the surrender and meteorological data to the French headquarters in Kunming.

Reports from Kandy state that Col. Roos, Chief of the SLEMO in Calcutta, is now en route to Saigon to take part in the Japanese surrender on the staff of the British representatives. With Col. Roos is Col. Fay, formerly French Air Attache in Kunming, whose exact status is undetermined, but who is a member of Lord Mountbatten's staff.



William J. Donovan  
Director



ACTION-CL, ME

INFO:

3

U

C

HUM-3

FE-2

72

EC-1925-3

This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone.

Chungking via War

Dated October 18, 1945

Rec'd 1 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington

1925, October 18, 10 a.m.

There follows summary of letter dated at Hanoi

September 29 addressed to President of US by Ho Chi Minh  
who signed as "President of Provisional Govt of Republic  
of Viet-Nam"; letter was delivered to US General Gallagher  
head of Chinese Combat Command Liaison Group with Chinese  
forces in North Indochina and forwarded to Embassy through  
US Army channels:

Saigon radio September 27 reported killing of US  
Colonel Peter Dewey in course of French instigated clash  
between Viet-Namese nationalists and French aggressors  
in Cochinchina. As Saigon is in hands of Franco-British  
forces report cannot be investigated now but we hope  
sincerely it is not true. But if correct incident may have  
been due to confusion in darkness or other unfortunate  
circumstances or may have been provoked by French or  
British.

-2- 1920, October 18, 10 a.m., from Chungking via War.

British. No matter what the case now moves us deeply and we will do utmost to search out culprits and punish them severely. Measures are being taken to prevent further such incidents. We assure you we are as profoundly affected by death of any American resident in this country as by that of dearest relatives.

We ask only of your representatives in this country to give us advance notice of movements of your nationals and to be more cautious in "trespassing" fighting areas. This will avoid accidents and aid in welcoming demonstrations. (Sent to Dept repeated to Paris)

I assure you of admiration and friendship we feel toward American people and its representatives here. That such friendly feelings have been exhibited not only to Americans themselves but also to impostors in American uniform is proof that US stand for international justice and peace is appreciated by entire Viet-Namense nation and "governing spheres".

I convey to you Mr. President and to American people expression of our great respect and admiration (END OF MESSAGE).

ROBERTSON

DU



Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DATE: Nov. 15, 1945

TO: :PE - Mr. Vincent

FROM: :SEA - Mr. Moffat

SUBJECT: Telegram to President Truman from  
Ho Chi Minh.

SEA considers that no action should be taken on the attached telegram from Ho Chi Minh to the President requesting membership of the so-called Viet-Nam Republic on the Far Eastern Advisory Commission.

*Allen*

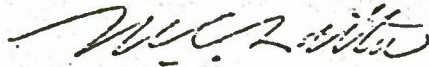
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SEA:ALMoffat:oc

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

October 17, 1945

Respectfully referred to the  
Secretary of State.



M. C. LATTI  
Executive Clerk



TELEGRAM

The White House

Washington

TIN RA. 349- VIA RCA

HANOI, VIA KUNMING, OCTOBER 17, 1945

M. HO CHI MINH PRESIDENT OF THE PROVISIONAL OF VIETNAM DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC TO PRESIDENT TRUMAN, WASHINGTON.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADVISORY COMMISSION FOR THE FAR EAST IS HEARTILY  
WELCOME BY VIETNAMESE PEOPLE IN PRINCIPLE STOP. TAKING INTO CONSIDER-  
TION PRIMO THE STRATEGICAL AND ECONOMICAL IMPORTANCE OF VIETNAM  
SECUNDO THE EARNEST DESIRE WHICH VIETNAM DEEPLY FEELS AND HAS UNANIMOUS  
MANIFESTED TO COOPERATE WITH THE OTHER DEMOCRACIES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT  
AND CONSOLIDATION OF WORLD PEACE AND PROSPERITY WE WISH TO CALL THE  
ATTENTION OF THE ALLIED NATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING POINTS COLON

FIRST ABSENCE OF VIETNAM AND PRESENCE OF FRANCE IN THE ADVISORY  
COMMISSION LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT FRANCE IS TO REPRESENT THE  
VIETNAMESE PEOPLE AT THE COMMISSION STOP SUCH REPRESENTATION IS GROUNDED  
LESS EITHER DE JURE OR DE FACTO. STOP. DE JURE NO ALLEGIANCE EXISTS  
ANY MORE BETWEEN FRANCE AND VIETNAM COLON BAODAI ABOLISHED TREATIES  
OF 1884 AND 1863 COMMA BAODAI VOLUNTARILY ABDICATED TO HAND OVER  
GOVERNMENT TO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT COMMA PROVISIONAL  
GOVERNMENT RECTORATED ABOLISHMENT OF TREATIES OF 1884 AND 1863 STOP  
DE FACTO SINCE MARCH NINTH FRANCE HAVING HANDED OVER GOVERNING RULE  
TO JAPAN HAS BROKEN ALL ADMINISTRATIVE LINKS WITH VIETNAM, SINCE AUGUST  
18, 1945, PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN A DE FACTO INDEPENDENT  
GOVERNMENT IN EVERY RESPECT, RECENT INCIDENTS IN SAIGON INSTIGATED BY  
THE FRENCH ROUSED UNANIMOUS DISAPPROVAL LEADING TO FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

TELEGRAM

The White House  
Washington

SECOND FRANCE IS NOT ENTITLED BECAUSE SHE HAD IGNOMINIOUSLY  
SOLD INDO CHINA TO JAPAN AND BETRAYED THE ALLIES. THIRD VIETNAM  
IS QUALIFIED BY ATLANTIC CHARTER AND SUBSEQUENT PEACE AGREEMENT  
AND BY HER GOODWILL AND HER UNFLINCHING STAND FOR DEMOCRACY TO  
BE REPRESENTED AT THE ADVISORY COMMISSION. STOP. WE ARE CONVINCED  
THAT VIETNAM AT COMMISSION WILL BE ABLE TO BRING EFFECTIVE CONTRI-  
BUTION TO SOLUTION OF PENDING PROBLEMS IN FAR EAST WHEREAS HER  
ABSENCE WOULD BRING FORTH UNSTABILITY AND TEMPORARY CHARACTER TO  
SOLUTIONS OTHERWISE REACH. THEREFORE WE EXPRESS EARNEST REQUEST  
TO TAKE PART IN ADVISORY COMMISSION FOR FAR EAST. STOP. WE SHOULD  
BE VERY GRATEFUL TO YOUR EXCELLENCY AND PREMIER ATTLEE PREMIER  
STALIN GENERALISSIMO TCHANG KAI SHEK FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF OUR  
DESIDERATA TO THE UNITED NATIONS.

RESPECTFULLY,

HOCUIMINS.

RECD/1120AM



DEPARTMENT  
OF  
STATE

INCOMING  
TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF  
CENTRAL SERVICES  
TELEGRAPH SECTION

ACTION: NOE

INFO: EP-1720-G

S This telegram must be  
U paraphrased before being  
C communicated to anyone  
ESC other than a Government  
EUR-3 Agency.

FE

DC/L-C

SFD-2 Secretary of State,

FC-14

OIC

INI

OPI

PL

A-B

SPA

SA

SA/GN

SA/M-2

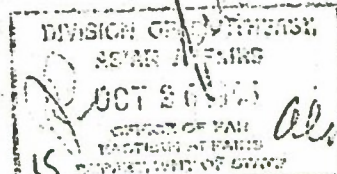
Washington.

6196, Oct. 23, 7 p.m.

Paris.

Dated Oct. 23, 1945.

Rec'd 12:48 a.m., 24th.



Number of papers today carry similar article

reporting Ho Chin Minh, president of Viet Minh, has  
appealed over Hanoi radio to President Truman, Prime

Minister Attlee and General de Gaulle and announced  
"Annamite Nationalist Govt" intends to hold plebiscite  
within two months to give constitution to Indo-China.

Article continues "official French circles" re-  
mark it does not seem likely Viet Minh will be able  
to hold such plebiscite. However, French Govt is not  
opposed in principle to such plebiscite if Ho Chin Minh  
represents entire population of Indo-China and not  
merely Viet Minh Party.

Only contacts which French authorities have had  
with Viet Minh, concludes article, have been undertaken  
solely to stop bloodshed and it would be incorrect to  
speak of real negotiations.

CAPPERY

JMS

No. 38

AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL  
Kunming, China, October 24, 1945.

Subject: Letters from Annamite Leaders;  
Situation in Indochina.

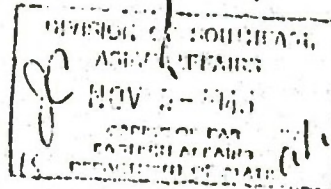
The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

Referring to the Consulate General's despatch No. 21 of September 27, 1945, in regard to the situation in Indochina, I have the honor to enclose: (a) copy of a letter addressed by HO Chi Minh, President of the "Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam", to the Secretary of State under date of October 22, 1945; (b) translation of a letter dated October 22, 1945, addressed by HSIAO Wen, Division of Overseas Affairs official serving with the Chinese Occupation Forces in Indochina, to General CHEN Cheng, Chinese Minister of War; and (c) translation of a letter dated October 22, 1945, addressed by Ho Chi Minh (Wade romanization written HU Chih-ming) and YUAN Yung-jui (Annamite ex-Empress Pao Tai) to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

The originals of these messages were brought to Kunming on October 24 by two United States Army officers who have been serving in the Hanoi area since the latter part of August as members of a G-5 Team for prisoner of war rescue work. Colonel Stephen Nordlinger, Commanding Officer of the team, informs me that he is carrying with him to Washington the original of the letter to the Secretary of State for appropriate delivery upon his arrival there. The originals of the letters to General Chen Cheng and to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in a sealed envelope addressed by the senders to General Cheng are being forwarded by this office to the Embassy at Chungking for delivery through United States Army channels. The officers who brought these messages to Kunming were not told by Ho Chi Minh of the contents thereof and the information contained in the letters to General Cheng and the Generalissimo will ostensibly be known only to the Chinese authorities. The Consulate General was requested to make a translation of the letters in as much as it was believed that they might contain information of a military nature of concern to the United States Army authorities.

Summary of Enclosures: In his letter to the Secretary of State, Ho Chi Minh states that he is forwarding various documents regarding the present situation in Indochina. (These documents are being forwarded as accompaniments to a separate despatch.) He refers to French oppression of the Annamites and the desire of the Annamites for realiza-





tion of the principles of the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters. He blames the French for the present disturbances in Indochina and asks for "immediate interference" by the United Nations lest the situation result in the spread of conflict throughout the Far East. He makes four requests: (1) The situation should be discussed at the first meeting of the Far Eastern Advisory Commission; (2) Annamite delegates should be allowed to present the views of the "Vietnamese Government"; (3) an investigation committee should be sent to Indochina; and (4) the United Nations should recognize Annamite independence.

The Chinese Overseas Affairs official states that Ho Chi Minh and Pao Tai desire to proceed secretly to Chungking to talk with the Generalissimo and asks that a plane be sent to Indochina for that purpose. In the letter from the Annamite leaders to the Generalissimo, they express their desire to proceed to Chungking to pay their respects to him and ask for a reply. End of Summary.

The United States Army officers describe conditions in Indochina as follows:

The situation is complicated by the food problem, aggravated by the failure of the Chinese Occupation Forces to bring food supplies with them. There are estimated to be approximately 100,000 Chinese troops in Indochina at present and they have taken over large rice stocks in the Haiphong area which otherwise might have been used to relieve the suffering. The French have expressed their willingness to transport rice from Saigon, which they wish to give to dealers in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas for sale, as the most effective method of distribution. Ho Chi Minh is willing to permit the transport of such rice and has agreed to see to its distribution as a gift of the French people but not as a gift from the French Government. Floods have caused a fifty percent loss in crops in the north while in Saigon there are large excess stocks of rice. The Chinese are now endeavoring to arrange for the transport of rice overland from Saigon but that will, of course, be a slow process, given the present condition of communications facilities.

The Annamites have been guilty of excesses, having killed 20 to 30 French women and children held as hostages at Saigon and having taken many other French hostages in the Hanoi-Haiphong and Vinh-Hue areas. In Hanoi Annamite armed squads are continually searching French homes for hidden weapons and the sight of Frenchmen standing against the wall outside their homes under guard by armed Annamites while others search the house is a frequent one.

Americans are extremely popular with the Annamites, who do everything possible to convince them of the justice of their cause. There are still evidences of pro-Vichy sentiment in the Hanoi area and those French who have not been held prisoner in the citadel are apt to be suspect to be those who played a part in the resistance movement.

The reason for the failure of the French representative, General Alessandri, to participate in the Japanese surrender ceremonies at Hanoi was the display of the Annamites of all United Nations flags except that of the French at the place of the ceremony. The Annamites refused to display the French flag on the grounds that the French had collaborated with the Japanese in Indochina and the Chinese authorities supported the Annamites in the contention. This feeling against the French was seen in monster mass meetings held frequently in Hanoi, the Annamites having taken over all administration buildings and public utilities in that area. They placarded the city with signs and slogans, such as those reading "Kill the French" - some of them in English for the eyes of Americans.

The French can, of course, return to Indochina but it will be a mistake unless they are prepared to reenter in strength sufficient to overpower the Annamite resistance in short order. If the French attempt to return to Indochina without overwhelming forces and impressive air support, the struggle will be long and bloody. The Annamites have only light arms - rifles, carbines and hand grenades - and could not stand up against heavy weapons. These have been provided them by the Americans as well as by the Japanese, the American arms having been given for use against the Japanese prior to the latter's surrender. Trouble at present is confined largely to the Hanoi-Haiphong and Vinh-Nue areas with the Saigon area somewhat better because of the presence of large numbers of British troops. Laos and Cambodia are practically free of Annamite influence.

The Chinese Occupation Forces have been circumspect and have compelled the Annamites in some cases, at American suggestion, to release French political prisoners. They have given no arms to the Annamites, being interested in obtaining as many as possible for themselves. The Chinese have, however, now brought in their own Annamite puppet, one Ngu Yen Hai Tan, who is a member of the Annamite Revolutionary League sponsored by the Kuomintang in China. He is said to have been an exile in China for the past twenty-four years. He is associated with the independence movement, as is his party, but has no place in the Government.

Colonel Nordlinger, the source of most of the foregoing information, states that he is proceeding to Washington shortly and that he will call at the Department in connection with the delivery of Ho Chi Minh's letter to the Secretary of State.

Respectfully yours,

*Philip D. Sprouse*  
Philip D. Sprouse  
American Consul

Enclosures:



Enclosures:

1. Letter from Ho Chi Minh to the Secretary of State, October 22, 1945.
2. Translation of Letter from Hsiao Wen to General Chen Cheng, October 22, 1945.
3. Translation of Letter from Ho Chi Minh and Pao Tai to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, October 22, 1945.

Original and hectograph to the Department.  
Copy to Embassy, Chungking.

800 PDSprouse/pds

(copy)

PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM

HANOI, October 22, 1945.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs  
to the SECRETARY OF STATE DEPARTMENT,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

EXCELLENCY,

The situation in South Vietnam has reached its critical stage, and calls for immediate interference on the part of the United Nations. I wish by the present letter to bring your Excellency some more light on the case of Vietnam which has come for the last three weeks into the international limelight.

First of all, I beg to forward to your Government a few documentary data, among which our Declaration of Independence, the Imperial Rescript of Ex-Emperor BAQ DAI on the occasion of his abdication, the declaration of our Government concerning its general foreign policy and a note defining our position towards the South Vietnam incident.

As those documents will show your Excellency, the Vietnamese people has known during the last few years an evolution which naturally brings the Vietnamese nation to its present situation. After 80 years of French oppression and unsuccessful though obstinate Vietnamese resistance, we at last saw France defeated in Europe, then her betrayal of the Allies successively on behalf of Germany and of Japan. Though the odds were at that time against the Allies, the Vietnamese, leaving aside all differences in political opinion, united in the Vietminh League and started on a ruthless fight against the Japanese. Meanwhile, the Atlantic Charter was concluded, defining the war aims of the Allies and laying the foundation of peace-work. The noble principles of international justice and equality of status laid down in that charter strongly appealed to the Vietnamese and contributed in making of the Vietminh resistance in the war zone a nation-wide anti-Japanese movement which found a powerful echo in the democratic aspirations of the people. The Atlantic Charter was looked upon as the foundation of future Vietnam. A nation-building program was drafted which was later found in keeping with San Francisco Charter and which has been fully carried out these last years: continuous fight against the Japanese bringing about the recovery of national independence on August 19th, voluntary abdication of Ex-Emperor Bao Dai, establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, assistance given to the Allies nations in the disarmament of the Japanese, appointment of a provisional Government whose mission was to carry out the Atlantic Charter and San Francisco Charters and have them carried out by other nations.

As a matter of fact, the carrying out of the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters implies the eradication of imperialism and all forms of colonial oppression. This was unfortunately contrary to the interests of some Frenchmen, and



France, to whom the colonists have long concealed the truth on Indochina, instead of entering into peaceable negotiations, resorted to an aggressive invasion, with all the means at the command of a modern nation. Moreover, having persuaded the British that the Vietnamese are wishing for a return of the French rule, they obtained, first from the British command in Southeast Asia, then from London, a tacit recognition of their sovereignty and administrative responsibility as far as South Vietnam is concerned. The British gave to understand that they had agreed to this on the ground that the reestablishment of French administration and, consequently, of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration would help them to speed up the demobilization, and the disarmament of the Japanese. But subsequent events will prove the fallacy of the argument. The whole Vietnamese nation rose up as one man against French aggression. The first street-shooting which was launched by the French in the small hours of September 23rd soon developed into real and organized warfare in which losses are heavy on both sides. The bringing in of French important reinforcements on board of the most powerful of their remaining warships will extend the war zone further. As murderous fighting is still going on in Indonesia, and as savage acts on the part of Frenchmen are reported every day, we may expect the flaring up of a general conflagration in the Far-East.

As it is, the situation in South Vietnam calls for immediate interference. The establishment of the Consultative Commission for the Far-East has been enthusiastically welcomed here as the first effective step towards an equitable settlement of the pending problems. The people of Vietnam, which only asks for full independence and for the respect of truth and justice, puts before your Excellency our following desiderata:

1o - the South Vietnam incident should be discussed at the first meeting of the Consultative Commission for the Far-East;

2o - Vietnamese delegates should be admitted to state the views of the Vietnamese Government;

3o - An Inquiry Commission should be sent to South Vietnam;

4o - the full independence of Vietnam should be recognized by the United Nations.

I avail myself of this opportunity to send your Excellency my best wishes.

Respectfully,

President HO CHI MINH

pds

TRANSLATION

Division of Overseas Affairs,  
First Front Army,  
Hanoi, October 22, 1945.

The Honorable  
Minister Ch'en.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that all the officials and people as well as the various parties and factions throughout Indochina have been unanimously united. I have been approached by Mr. HU Chih-ming, Chairman of the Provisional Government of Indochina, and Mr. YUAN Yung-jui, who was formerly Emperor Pao Ta of Annam, with the request that arrangements be made whereby they may be secretly conducted to Chungking to call on you and to be introduced to His Excellency Chairman Chiang at an interview.

With your approval, I respectfully request that an airplane be sent to Indochina in order that I may accompany Messrs. Hu and Yuan on their trip to Chungking. The joint letter from Messrs. Hu and Yuan is transmitted herewith. Your instructions are requested for my guidance in the premises.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(sealed) HSIAO WEN

pds



enclosure no. 5 to dispatch no.  
33 dated October 24, 1945  
Chen Kai-shek

TRANSLATION.

Hanoi, October 22, 1945.

His Excellency  
Chairman Chiang Kai-shek,  
Care of Minister Chen.

Excellency:

We have the honor to state that we - HU Chih-ming,  
Chairman of the Provisional Government of the Democratic  
Republic of Indochina, and High Advisor YUAN Yung-jui  
(Former Emperor Pao Tu) - desire to proceed to Chungking  
to pay our respects to your Excellency and to call on  
Minister Ch'en. If this meets with your approval, we  
shall appreciate your being good enough to favor us with  
a reply.

We have the honor to be, Your Excellency,

Your obedient servants,

HU CHIH-MING  
YUAN YUNG-JUI

pds

DEPARTMENT  
OF  
STATE

132

INCOMING  
TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF  
CENTRAL SERVICES  
TELEGRAPH SECTION

NOV 19 1945  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION: WE, CA

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RCS-1835-K

This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone.

Chungking via Navy

Dated November 8, 1945

Rec'd 9:15 p.m., 9th

Secretary of State,

Washington.

1948, November 8, 6 p.m.

DIVISION OF SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN AFFAIRS  
NOV 13 1945  
OFFICE OF FAR  
EASTERN AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

There follows substance of letter addressed to  
President Truman by Ho-Chi-minh who signs as "Presi-  
dent of Provisional Government of Republic of Viet-  
nam": Letter was given to General Gallagher and  
forwarded to Embassy through U.S. Army channels:  
(Embassy's 1820 October 18 to Department repeated to  
Paris).

I wish to give following information concerning  
situation of Viet-Nam:

(1) When Japanese came to Indo-China from Sept-  
ember 1940 to September 1941 France, by protocol July  
1941 and secret military pact December 8, 1941, gave  
up sovereignty and took position opposed to Allies. On  
Japanese drive March 9, 1945 French either fled or  
surrendered

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NOV 13 1945  
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ACTION: WE, CA

133

MR. COFF

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MC-1948 -P CORRECTED PAGE TWO AND THREE  
This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone.

22/11/48  
12/11/48

2- #1948, November 8, 6 p.m. from Chungking via Navy  
surrendered to Japanese contrary to pledges contained  
in protective treaties March 1874 and June 1884, thus  
breaking all legal and administrative ties with people  
of Indo-China. Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was  
set up August 19, 1945 after independence of entire  
country was wrested from Japanese. After Japanese  
surrender, while Viet-Nam Provisional Government in  
capacity of an independent Government was carrying  
out a building-up program in conformity with Atlantic  
and San Francisco Charters, French, ignoring del-  
iberately all peace treaties concluded by United  
Nations at end of World War II, attacked us treacher-  
ously in Haigon, September 23, and are planning a war  
of aggression against Viet-Nam. (Sent to Department  
repeated to Paris).

(2) People of Viet-Nam are willing cooperate with  
United Nations in erection of lasting world peace and,  
having suffered so severely under direct domination of  
French and much more from bargain made by French with  
Japan in.

Doc 648-11-840-100

-3- #1948, November 8, 6 p.m. from Chungking via Navy

Japan in 1941, are determined never to permit French to return to Indo China. If French troops coming either from China where they fled during Japanese occupation of Indo-China or from other places put foot on any part of Viet-Nameese territory the people of Viet-Nam are determined to fight them under any circumstances.

(3) If, therefore, disorder, bloodshed or general conflagration due to causes mentioned above in paragraph (2) break out in Far Eastern Asia entire responsibility must be imputed to French. (End substance letter).

Identical message from Ho-Chi-Min addressed to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek has also been received by same army channels. Embassy will not deliver message to Gimo unless so directed by Department.

ROBERTSON

JMS



DEPARTMENT  
OF  
STATE

INCOMING  
TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF  
CENTRAL SERVICES  
TELEGRAPH SECTION

WLB-SEA

181

ACTION: SEA, DC/L

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This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone.

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DC/L-K

Secretary of State,

LA-1

Washington.

Chungking via Army

Dated November 23, 1945

Rec'd. 12:25 a.m., 24th

2026, Nov 23, 4 p.m.

Below is given substance of identical communications  
addressed by Ho-Chi-Minh to President Truman and to  
Director General of UNRRA; communications were given to  
General Gallagher and forwarded to Embassy through US  
Army channels. (Embassy's 1982, Nov 9 to Dept. repeated to  
Paris):

I wish to invite attention of your Excellency for  
strictly humanitarian reasons to following matter. Two  
million Vietnamese died of starvation during winter of  
1944 and spring 1945 because of starvation policy of  
French who seized and stored until it rotted all avail-  
able rice (Sent Dept; repeated Paris). Three-fourths of  
cultivated land was flooded in summer 1945, which was  
followed by a severe drouth; of normal harvest five-sixths  
was lost. The presence of Chinese occupational army

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increases

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740.00119 FEAC/11-2545

-2- #2026, Nov 23, 4 p.m., from Chungking via Army

increases number of persons who must be fed with stocks already not sufficient. Also transport of rice from Cochinchina is made impossible by conflict provoked by French. Many people are starving and casualties increase every day. Everything possible has been done under these circumstances by Provisional Government of Vietnam Republic. Unless great world powers and international relief organizations bring us immediate assistance we face imminent catastrophe. I earnestly appeal to Your Excellency, therefore, for any available assistance. I request your Excellency to accept my heartfelt and anticipated thanks in name of my people.

ROBERTSON

VFS





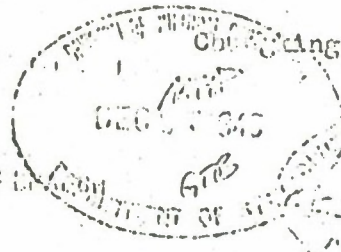
THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

71K8

Nov 26, 1945

DEC 11 1945

Chongking, November 26, 1945



542 (op) 305  
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No. 890

Subject: Transmittal of copies of communications from the "Provisional Government of the Republic of Vietnam".

The Charge d'Affaires a.i. has the honor to refer to recent telegrams from the Embassy regarding Indochina and to transmit copies of three communications from President Ho Chi-minh of the "Provisional Government of the Republic of Vietnam". These communications were delivered to General Gallagher, United States Army, head of the Chinese Combat Liaison Group with the Chinese forces in North Indochina, and forwarded to the Embassy through United States Army channels.

The communication for Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek will not be delivered to him by the Embassy unless so instructed by the Department.

Enclosures: *att. L.*

1. Copy of letter from President Ho Chi-minh, Vietnam Democratic Republic to Secretary of State dated November 1, 1945.
2. Copy of telegram to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek dated October 28, 1945.
3. Copy of telegram to Secretary of State, undated.



Original and photograph to the Department.  
Copy for Embassy, Paris, through Department

RLSmyth:cam  
File

c-89

REC-1000

ERIC.01/11-2645

CS/VJ

Enclosure No. 1 to despatch no. 820 dated November 26, 1945  
from Embassy, Chungking, China

Hanoi 1st of November 1945

President Ho Chi Minh of Provisional Government of Viet-Nam  
Democratic Republic

to His Excellency James Bryner  
Secretary of State Department of the United States of America  
Washington, D.C.

Excellency,

On behalf of the Vietnam Cultural Association, I beg to express the desire of this Association to send to the United States of America a delegation of about fifty Vietnam youths with a view to establishing friendly cultural relations with the American youth on the one hand, and carrying on further studies in Engineering, Agriculture as well as other lines of specialization on the other.

The desire which I am conveying to your Excellency has been expressed to me by all the Vietnam Engineers, Lawyers, Professors, as well as other representatives of our intelligentsia whom I have come across.

They have been all these years keenly interested in things American and earnestly desirous to get into touch with the American people whose fine stand for the noble ideals of international Justice and Humanity, and whose modern technical achievements have so strongly appealed to them.

I sincerely wish that this plan would be favored by your approbation and assistance and avail myself of this opportunity to express to your Excellency my best wishes.

President Ho-CHI-MINH

(signed) Ho Chi Minh

*No Che Minh  
To  
Sec of State  
1 Nov '45*



Enclosure No. 2 to despatch no. 800 dated November 26, 1945  
from Embassy, Chungking.

TELEGRAM

Hanoi October 28th 1945

HOCHIMINH President of PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT of VIETNAM  
REPUBLIC

to Marshall CHIANG KAI SHEK Republic of CHINA

In the name of the Provisional Government of Vietnam  
Republic we emphatically protest against use of Japanese  
troops by British Indian army under command of General  
Gracey and by French army under command of General Leclerc  
in the repression of Vietnamese national liberation movement  
in South Indochina stop

Under pretence of disarming the Japanese Generals  
Gracey and Leclerc dispersed Japanese troops throughout  
South Vietnam provinces as vanguard to British Indian  
and French troops with view to reestablishing French  
domination over Indochina stop.

The Vietnamese people having ruthlessly fought against  
Japanese fascism and having just established democratic  
regime throughout its country feels greatest indignation  
in presence of such unjustifiable behaviour on the part of  
British and French stop

Therefore we strongly appeal to and eagerly request your  
Excellency to

primo issue order to stop massacre of a people  
defending its legitimate rights according to principles  
laid down in Atlantic and San Francisco charters

secundo recognize full independence of Vietnam  
Republic final stop

Respectfully

HQ CHI MINH

*Ho Chi Minh  
to State  
Sec 1*

<sup>143</sup>  
Enclosure to despatch no. 870, dated November 26, 1945 from  
Embassy, Chungking.

T E L E G R A M

Hochiminh President Provisional Government Vietnam Republic  
to His Excellency the Secretary of State Department Washington  
D.C.

On occasion of inauguration Washington Conference for the  
Far East we regret absence of Vietnamese delegation Stop Once  
again, we deny France every right to speak on behalf of Viet-  
namese people Stop France under cover of British-Indian and  
Japanese troops having perpetrated an aggression on Vietnamese  
Republic in order to impose her domination has deliberately  
violated all principles proclaimed in Atlantic and San Fran-  
cisco Charters Stop Vietnamese fighting for more than a  
month despite bloody opposition of Anglo-Indian French and  
Japanese Troops has proclaimed their will to live free and  
independent under democratic construction Stop The Vietnamese  
people expresses sincere hope that all free nations in world  
comma carrying out high ideal of generosity and humanity  
expressed in President Truman's speech comma recognise  
independence of Vietnam republic and put a stop to merderous  
conflict in South Vietnam Stop Respectfully HochiMinh



C-O-P-Y

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Incoming Telegram

PEM-P  
Paraphrase before communicating to anyone.

4936

Chungking via War

Dated February 13, 1946

Rec'd 6:18 a.m., 14th

Secretary of State,

Washington.

281, Feb 13, 10 a.m.

There follows substance of letter dated Jan 18, 1946 addressed to President Truman by Ho Chi-Minh just received by Embassy through US Army channels: he extends congratulations to President on occasion of opening of first Assembly of United Nations in London, and on efforts of American Govt to maintain peace and security throughout world.

EMBTEL 1948 Nov 8, 6 p.m.

Since peace is indivisible and Far East is receiving particular consideration by appointment of General Marshall as Special Representative in China, he believes it his duty to inform President of developments in Indochina and consequences for world security of French aggression.

Sent Dept as 281 repeated Paris as 1.

In 1941 Vietnam rose up to oppose Japanese Fascism and sided with Allies. After Japan surrendered a provisional government was set up to eradicate Fascism in Vietnam and restore order. Supported by whole nation, it carried out a democratic program, and restored order and discipline. Under difficult circumstances general elections for national Congress were held on Jan 6, 1946. Ninety percent of the nine million electors voted. French colonialists on contrary surrendered to Japan in Sept 1941 and for four years cooperation with Japanese against the Allies and in oppression of Vietnam. By a second surrender March 9, 1945, five months before Japanese defeat, French lost all right and control in Indochina.

French attacked population of Saigon on Sept 23, 1945 while Vietnam Democratic Republic was endeavoring to carry out reconstruction program. It was followed by systematic destruction and murderous warfare. Each day brings new reports of looting, violence, assassination of civilians, and indiscriminate bombing of non-strategical places by military planes. It is French intention to invade entire country and reestablish their domination.

C-O-P-Y

#281, Feb 13, 10 a.m., from Chungking via War

After "offer of interference (intervention?)" made by Mr. John Carter Vincent, people of Vietnam enthusiastically welcomed President Truman's address of October 28, 1945 in which he set forth the principles of self-determination and equality of status laid down in Atlantic and San Francisco Charters. Since then, French have greatly increased their fighting forces with result that millions will suffer, thousands will die and invaluable properties will be destroyed unless United States intervenes to stop bloodshed and unlawful aggression.

On behalf of people and Govt of Indochina, he requests President's intervention for an immediate solution of Vietnamese issue. People of Vietnam earnestly hope that the great American Republic will help them achieve full independence and support them in their reconstruction work.

Thus, with assistance of China and United States, in capital and technique, Vietnam Republic will be able to contribute her share to building up world peace and prosperity.

Another letter was received addressed to General Marshall which is identical with one addressed to President, except that opening paragraph extends Ho Chi-Minh's congratulations to General Marshall on his appointment to China and expressed conviction that an understanding of real situation in Vietnam can make some small contribution to task in China which confronts him.

SMITH

Shown to WO 8:45 p.m. Feb 14.

WTD

C-O-P-Y



86

*Ho Chi Minh  
to HST.*

HANOI FEBRUARY 19 1946

President HO CHI MINH,  
Provisional Government of  
VIETNAM DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC,  
HANOITo the PRESIDENT  
of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,

I avail myself of this opportunity to thank you and the people of United States for the interest shown by your representatives at the United Nations Organization in favour of the dependent peoples.

Our VIETNAM people, as early as 1941, stood by the Allies' side and fought against the Japanese and their associates, the French colonialists.

From 1941 to 1945 we fought bitterly, sustained by the patriotism of our fellow-countrymen and by the promises made by the Allies at YALTA, SAN FRANCISCO and MOSCOW.

When the Japanese were defeated in August 1945, the whole Vietnam territory was united under a Provisional Republican Government which immediately set out to work. In five months, peace and order were restored, a democratic republic was established on legal bases, and adequate help was given to the Allies in the carrying out of their disarmament mission.

But the French colonialists, who had betrayed in war-time both the Allies and the Vietnamese, have come back and are waging on us a murderous and pitiless war in order to reestablish their domination. Their invasion has extended to South Vietnam and is menacing us in North Vietnam. It would take volumes to give even an abbreviated report of the crimes and assassinations

they are committing every day in the fighting area.

This aggression is contrary to all principles of international law and to the pledges made by the Allies during the World War. It is a challenge to the noble attitude shown before, during and after the war by the United States Government and People. It violently contrasts with the firm stand you have taken in your twelve point declaration, and with the idealistic loftiness and generosity expressed by your delegates to the United Nations Assembly, MR BYRNES, SESTILIUS and J.F. DULLES.

The French aggression on a peace-loving people is a direct menace to world security. It implies the complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies. The United Nations ought to keep their words. They ought to interfere to stop this unjust war, and to show that they mean to carry out in peace-time the principles for which they fought in war-time.

Our Vietnam people, after so many years of spoliation and devastation, is just beginning its building-up work. It needs security and freedom, first to achieve internal prosperity and welfare, and later to bring its small contribution to world-reconstruction.

These security and freedom can only be guaranteed by our independence from any colonial power, and our free cooperation with all other powers. It is with this firm conviction that we request of the United States as guardians and champions of World Justice to take a decisive step in support of our independence.

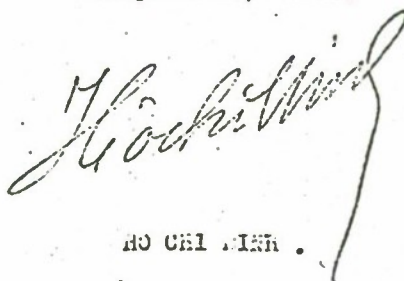
What we ask has been graciously granted to the Philippines.



Like the Philippines our goal is full independence and full cooperation with the UNITED STATES. We will do our best to make this independence and cooperation profitable to the whole world.

I am, Dear Mr PRESIDENT,

Respectfully Yours.



HO CHI MINH .

C-O-P-Y

Viet-Nam Dan Chu Cong Hoa

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Chinh Phu Lam Thoi

BO NGOAI GIAO

N O T E

to the Governments of CHINA, UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA, UNION OF SOCIALIST SOVIETIC REPUBLICS  
and GREAT-BRITAIN.

I.- In 1940, the French in Indochina betrayed the Allies. They deliberately opened the doors of Indochina to the Japanese troops, signed with the latter a military, political and economical pact. The Nippo-French cooperation policy, promoted and carried out with conviction and industry by JEAN DECOUX, former Governor-General of Indochina, was directed against the democratic movements inside Indochina and the Allied Nations outside. In fact the French put at the disposal of the Japanese forces the strategic bases, the economic and financial resources of Indochina. The technical services, especially the Indochinese Intelligence Service supplied the Japanese with precious informations. The French airfields of GIALA, TAYSONHAT and others were handed over to the Japanese Air Forces, new metalled tracts were created with the collaboration of French technicians at TRAI CUT, SONIA, PHUTHO, BACGIANG, PHANHMOA, PHUCTHO, PHUCYEN, VIIHYEN. French colonialis launched violent propaganda campaigns against the Allies, and personal instructions were given by Governor-General Decoux to the I.P.P. (Information, Press, Propaganda Service) to that effect. The French administration requisitioned considerable stocks of rice, thus starving a population of 20 million inhabitants among whom 2,000,000 died of famine and hardships, in the course of five months (from January to May 1945), all this to feed the Japanese army in their Western and Southern operations.

In the meanwhile, the Vietnamese nationalist parties made repeated appeals to the French for a joint action against the Japanese. These appeals were ignored by the French Government.

On March 9, 1945, the French surrendered to the Japanese, after a sham fight which did not last a couple of days. Stocks of arms, ammunitions, fortifications, airfields, millions of liters of oil were handed over to the Japanese. This extraordinary carelessness denoted, if not complicity, at least an obvious goodwill on the part of the French. Thus, twice in the course of five years, the French have willingly helped the fascists in their fight against the democracies. Twice the French have willingly handed over to the Japanese capital strategic, economical and technical advantages, for the prosecution of the Pacific Battle.

II.- In August 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the Allies. The popular forces of Vietnam which, since 1940, had made incessant attacks on the Japanese forces, and which had, in 1944, succeeded in creating a "Free Zone" in Northern Indochina, went down to conquer the capital-city and the governing rule. The population, fired with democratic aspirations

C-O-P-Y



and spirit, enthusiastically welcomed them and manifested their desire to maintain their unity for the grandeur of the Fatherland once lost and now found again. On September 2, 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was solemnly proclaimed. Twice, first through Emperor Bao-Dai of the NGUYEN Dynasty, then, through the solemn proclamation of the new Government on Independence Day, the new State abrogated all the treaties formerly forced upon us by the French victors. The new Republic of Vietnam, thus legally instituted, is in the reconstruction of the world a factor of peace and progress. She is entitled for her safeguard to refer to the most sacred principles of SAN FRANCISCO and ATLANTIC Charters. She is based on and draws her strength from, the first of SUN YAT SEN's Three Principles and the second, fourth, sixth points of President TRUMAN's twelve-point declaration.

III.- But, on September 23, 1945, the French troops attacked Saigon, starting an invasion which is now in its fifth month. That invasion is menacing North Vietnam and French troops have begun to filter through our Chinese frontier. That aggression, carried on by an experienced and numerous army, fully equipped with the most recent inventions of modern warfare, has brought about the destruction of our towns and villages, the assassination of our civilian population, the starving of a great part of our country. Untold atrocities have been committed, not as reprisals upon our guerrillas troops, but on women and children and unarmed old people. These atrocities are beyond imagination and beyond words, and remind one of the darkest ages: assault on the sanitary formations, on Red Cross personnel, bombing and machine-gunning of villages, raping of women, looting and indiscriminate pillaging of Vietnam and Chinese houses, etc... Yet, despite the maltreatments of the civilian population, we have, for 5 long months, opposed a stubborn resistance, fought in the worst conditions, without food, medicine and without clothings. And we shall carry on, sustained by our faith in international honour, and in our final victory.

IV.- In the free zone of our national territory, especially in the area under Chinese control, North of the 16th parallel, our civilians have set out to work. The results of these five months of building-up work are most favourable and give rise to the brightest hopes.

First of all, democracy has been established on solid foundations. On January 6 last, general elections were organized with the greatest success. In a few days 400 representatives of the entire country will hold the first session of the Constituent National Assembly. A new administrative organization has replaced the old mandarin system. The most unpopular taxes have been abolished. The anti-illiteracy campaign organized along efficient lines, has yielded unexpectedly optimistic results. The primary and secondary schools as well as the University have been reopened to more and more numerous students. Peace and order are restored and smoothly maintained.

C-O-P-Y

C-O-P-Y

In the economic field, the situation is bettering every day. All the vexatious measures imposed by colonial planned economy have been abrogated. Commerce, production, the transformation and consummation of raw materials, once subjected to very strict regulations, are now operated on an entirely free basis. The shortage of rice, though still critical, has been relieved by the intensive production of other food-stuffs and the price of rice has been reduced some 40 % of its 1945 figures. Cereals, matches, salt, tobacco, once monopolized by speculators, are now offered on the normal markets at prices within reach of the common man. All public services have resumed their prewar activities, and the Vietnamese staff under their Vietnamese Directors, are working with industry and efficacy. The communications have been reestablished, the dam system not only mended but still fortified.

All this program was carried out while in the South, the French aggression has intensified every day. The Vietnam people, despite the difficulties of the present, and the heavy heritage of five years of Nippo-French condominium, has shown the world what it is worth. Foreign correspondents and members of the Allies Missions who have come to the country can bear witness to the new life in regenerated Vietnam, to our capacity to self-government, our desire to live free and independent, and our faith in the ATLANTIC and SAN FRANCISCO Charters.

#### CONCLUSION.-

For those reasons, we think it our duty to send this note to the Great Powers -- which had led the anti-fascist crusade to final victory and which had taken up the reconstruction of the world with a view to definitely outlawing war, oppression and exploitation on the one hand, misery, fear and injustice on the other. We request of these great powers:

a) To take all proper steps to stop by an urgent interference, the bloodshed that is taking place in South Vietnam, and to arrive at an urgent and fair settling of the Indochinese issue. We are confident in their mediation that may be given to us in this Pacific World a status worthy of a people that had fought and suffered for the democratic ideals. So doing, they will give a solid foundation to peace and security in this part of the world, and fulfill the hopes that the oppressed peoples had placed in them. While waiting with confidence for a positive measure from the Governments of WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, LONDON, and CHUNGKING, we have determined to fight to our last drop of blood against the reestablishment of French imperialism.

b) To bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations' Organization. We only ask full independence, independence that is so far a fact, and that will enable us to cooperate with the other nations in the building-up of a better world and lasting peace. Such aspirations are but legitimate and the cause of world peace must be defended.

Hanoi, February 18, 1946.

C-O-P-Y



HANOI, undated.

[Received February 27 - 11:45 a.m.]

From Landon for Moffat and Culbertson.

1. Sainteny stated that in conversation with Ho Chi Minh he offered Annamese complete independence within French community: That this meant that Annamese would have benefit of French advisers in every department of Government: That for instance Annamese Foreign Office would express its policies through French channels: That Annamese Army and War Ministry would be coordinated with French Army and War Ministry: And that Annamese if [in?] Finance and Commerce Ministries would heed French advisers as Annamese were inexpert in these matters and might jeopardize [apparent garble] French investment. Sainteny said that Annamese in Cochin China would probably prefer to remain French Colony rather come under northern Annamese Government. In this connection Ho Chi Minh said that French officials had conferred with him but that they were vague in their comments and had avoided the real issues of Annamese independence so that he had asked them to get specific terms from Paris which would make clear whether the French really offered Annamese independence or were merely using new language to describe usual French control Annamese affairs.

2. Ho Chi Minh handed me two letters addressed to President of USA, China, Russia, and Britain, identical copies of which were stated to have been forwarded to other governments named. In two letters Ho Chi Minh requests USA as one of United Nations to support idea of Annamese independence according to Philippines example, to examine the case of the Annamese, and to take steps necessary to maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina. He asserts that Annamese will fight until United Nations interfere in support of Annamese independence. The petition addressed to major United Nations contains:

a. Review of French relations with Japanese where French Indochina allegedly aided Japs:

b. Statement of establishment on 2 September 1945 of [Provisional Government of?] Democratic Republic of Viet Minh:

c. Summary of French conquest of Cochin China begun 23 Sept 1945 and still incomplete:

d. Outline of accomplishments of Annamese Government in Tonkin including popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities:

e. Request to four powers: (1) to intervene and stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate fair settlement and (2) to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations Organization. The petition ends with statement that Annamese ask for full independence in fact and that in interim while awaiting UNO decision the Annamese will continue to fight the reestablishment of French imperialism. Letters and petition will be transmitted to Department soonest.

[LANDON]



EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Paris, September 12, 1946.

No. 6141



Subject: Transmitting Memorandum of  
Conversation with Ho Chi-minh.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 6151

dated September 11, 1946, regarding my conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh, President of the Republic of Viet-Nam,  
and to enclose herewith a memorandum prepared by First  
Secretary George M. Abbott covering his conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh later in the day.

Respectfully yours,

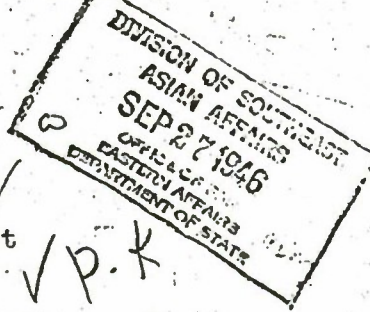
Jefferson Caffery

Enclosure:

Memorandum of conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh prepared by  
First Secretary George M. Abbott

C-102

Original and hectograph to Department  
Copies to Saigon, London, and Moscow



SEIG. 00/9-1246

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF FOREIGN  
REPORTING SERVICES  
SEP 23 1946

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Paris, September 12, 1946.

MEMORANDUM

To: The Ambassador

From: George M. Abbott

In accordance with your request, I called last night on Ho Chi-minh and had a conversation lasting an hour.

Ho Chi-minh first discussed his contacts with Americans dating back to his guerrilla warfare against the Japanese when OSS and Army officers were parachuted into his jungle headquarters and culminating in his talk with you. He emphasized his admiration for the United States and the respect and affection for President Roosevelt which is found even in the remote villages of his country. He referred particularly to our policy toward the Philippines and pointed out that it was only natural that his people, seeing an independent Philippines on one side and India about to gain its freedom on the other, should expect France to understand that similar measures for Indochina are inevitable.

He then took up the question of his supposed Communist connections which he, of course, denied. Ho Chi-minh pointed out that there are no Communist ministers in his government and that the Viet-Nam constitution opens with a guarantee of personal liberties and the so-called rights of man and also guarantees the right to personal property. He admits that there are Communists in Annam but claims that the Communist Party as such dissolved itself several months ago.

The President then outlined his relations with France in general and the developments during the Fontainebleau Conference in particular. He pointed out that all of the various provisions of the preliminary agreement of March 6, 1946, had been fulfilled except the provisions regarding a referendum in Cochinchina. The Viet-Nam has its own government, its parliament, its army, and controls its finances. Regarding Cochinchina, however, the French have been unwilling to set any date for the referendum or to agree to the proposal that a joint Viet-Nam-French commission should be named to arrange for and supervise the referendum. At the same time the French authorities in Indochina have not respected the truce in Cochinchina and have continued military operations against resistance elements loyal to the Viet-Nam.

Ho Chi-minh realizes that the present French Government is a provisional one and that until a French constitution was adopted, the outlines of the French

Union established, and a permanent government chosen, it was difficult for French officials to sign any permanent treaty or agreement with the Viet-Nam. For that reason he was quite willing to adjourn the Fontainebleau Conference until January or thereabouts.

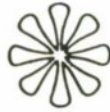
With regard to the modus vivendi which should have been signed September 10, 1946, Ho Chi-minh said that agreements had been reached regarding French economic and cultural rights in the Viet-Nam, a customs union for Indochina, and a common currency, although there had been some difficulty over the drafting since he refused to allow the phrase "Indochinese Federation", since it does not yet exist. The French, however, have not accepted the Viet-Nam demand that "democratic liberties" be restored in Cochinchina. Ho Chi-minh explained that by this he meant freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the release of political prisoners. The Viet-Nam also insists that they be permitted to send a delegation to Cochinchina to make sure that the French live up to these provisions and to cooperate with the French in bringing about the end of guerrilla warfare. He admitted that there are many unsavory elements within the resistance movement in Cochinchina, but argued that if his representatives could go through the country and talk to local leaders it would be possible to distinguish between bandits and patriots, and the former could then be liquidated by either his or the French forces.

Ho Chi-minh stated that he still hoped to reach an agreement with the French before his departure on September 14, but that in any case he must return on that date since he had already been too long away from his country.

Ho Chi-minh spoke at various times of the aid which he hoped to get from the United States, but was vague except as regards economic aid. With regard to the latter, he explained that the riches of his country were largely undeveloped, that he felt that Indochina offered a fertile field for American capital and enterprise. He had resisted and would continue to resist the French desire for a continuation of their former policy of economic monopoly. He was willing to give the French priority in such matters as advisers, concessions, and purchases of machinery and equipment, but if the French were not in a position to meet his country's needs he would insist on the right to approach other friendly countries. He hinted that the policy might apply to military and naval matters as well and mentioned the naval base at Cam Ranh bay.

As I left, Ho Chi-minh stated that he hoped that through his contacts with the Embassy the American public would be informed of the true situation in Indochina.





# **UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS**

## **1945 - 1967**

### **II**

**U. S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE**

**FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR**

**1950 - 1954**

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN  
THE FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR  
1950-1954

Foreword

This portion of the study treats U.S. policy towards the war in Indochina from the U.S. decision to recognize the Vietnamese Nationalist regime of the Emperor Bao Dai in February, 1950, through the U.S. deliberations on military intervention in late 1953 and early 1954. Section A examines the triangular relationship of France, the U.S., and the Bao Dai regime. Section B analyzes the intervention issue, and the antecedents to the Geneva Conference.

- A. United States, France, and Vietnamese Nationalism
- B. Toward a Negotiated Settlement



## II. A. UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM

### SUMMARY

It has been argued that even as the U.S. began supporting the French in Indochina, the U.S. missed opportunities to bring peace, stability and independence to Vietnam. The issues arise from the belief on the part of some critics that (a) the U.S. made no attempt to seek out and support a democratic-nationalist alternative in Vietnam; and (b) the U.S. commanded, but did not use, leverage to move the French toward granting genuine Vietnamese independence.

The record shows that through 1953, the French pursued a policy which was based on military victory and excluded meaningful negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. The French did, however, recognize the requirement for an alternative focus for Vietnamese nationalist aspirations, and from 1947 forward, advanced the "Bao Dai solution." The record shows that the U.S. was hesitant through 1949 to endorse the "Bao Dai solution" until Vietnam was in fact unified and granted autonomy and did consistently support the creation of a genuinely independent, non-communist Vietnamese government to supplant French rule. Nonetheless, the fall of China and the deteriorating French military position in Indochina caused both France and the U.S. to press the "Bao Dai solution." In early 1950, after French ratification of the Elysee Agreement granting "Vietnam's independence," the U.S. recognized Bao Dai and initiated military and economic aid, even before transfer of governmental power actually occurred. Thereafter, the French yielded control only pro forma, while the Emperor Bao Dai adopted a retiring, passive role, and turned his government over to discreditable politicians. The Bao Dai regime was neither popular nor efficient, and its army, dependent on French leadership, was powerless. The impotence of the Bao Dai regime, the lack of any perceptible alternatives (except for the communists), the fact of continued French authority and control over the GVN, the fact that the French alone seemed able to contain communism in Indochina -- all these constrained U.S. promptings for a democratic-nationalist government in Vietnam. (Tab 1)

The U.S.-French ties in Europe (NATO, Marshall Plan, Mutual Defense Assistance Program) only marginally strengthened U.S. urgings that France make concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. Any leverage from these sources was severely limited by the broader considerations of U.S. policy for the containment of communism in Europe and Asia. NATO and the Marshall Plan were of themselves judged to be essential to our European interests. To threaten France with economic and military sanctions in Europe in order to have it alter its policy in Indochina was, therefore, not plausible. Similarly, to reduce the level of

military assistance to the French effort in Indochina would have been counter-productive, since it would have led to a further deterioration in the French military position there. In other words, there was a basic incompatibility in the two strands of U.S. policy: (1) Washington wanted France to fight the anti-communist war and win, preferably with U.S. guidance and advice; and (2) Washington expected the French, when battlefield victory was assured, to magnanimously withdraw from Indochina. For France, which was probably fighting more a colonial than an anti-communist war, and which had to consider the effects of withdrawal on colonial holdings in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, magnanimous withdrawal was not too likely.

France, having no such policy incompatibilities, could and did pursue a consistent course with the stronger bargaining hand. Thus, the French were able to resist pressures from Washington and through the MAAG in Saigon to create a truly Vietnamese army, to grant the Vietnamese more local autonomy and to wage the war more effectively. MAAG was relegated to a supply function and its occasional admonitions to the French were interpreted by them as interference in their internal affairs. Even though by 1954, the U.S. was financing 78% of the costs of the war, the French retained full control of the dispensation of military assistance and of the intelligence and planning aspects of the military struggle. The expectation of French victory over the Viet Minh encouraged the U.S. to "go along" with Paris until the conclusion of the war. Moreover, the U.S. was reluctant to antagonize the French because of the high priority given in Washington's planning to French participation in the European Defense Community. France, therefore, had considerable leverage and, unless the U.S. supported Paris on its own terms, the French could, and indeed did, threaten not to join the EDC and to stop fighting in Indochina. (Tab 2)

American thinking and policy-making was dominated by the tendency to view communism in monolithic terms. The Viet Minh was, therefore, seen as part of the Southeast Asia manifestation of the world-wide communist expansionary movement. French resistance to Ho Chi Minh, in turn, was thought to be a crucial link in the containment of communism. This strategic perception of the communist threat was supported by the espousal of the domino principle: the loss of a single nation in Southeast Asia to communism would inexorably lead to the other nations of the area falling under communist control. The domino principle, which probably had its origin at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China, was at the root of U.S. policy. Although elements of a domino-like theory could be found in NSC papers before the start of the Korean War, the Chinese intervention in Korea was thought to be an ominous confirmation of its validity. The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to that in Korea, was feared, especially after the armistice in Korea.



The Eisenhower Administration followed the basic policy of its predecessor, but also deepened the American commitment to containment in Asia. Secretary Dulles pursued a forthright, anti-communist policy and made it clear that he would not permit the "loss" of Indochina, in the manner the Democrats had allegedly allowed the "loss" of China. Dulles warned China not to intervene, and urged the French to drive toward a military victory. Dulles was opposed to a cease-fire and tried to dissuade the French from negotiations with the Viet Minh until they had markedly improved their bargaining position through action on the battlefield. The NSC in early 1954 was persuaded that a non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to the Viet Minh. In consequence of this more militant policy, the U.S. Government tended to focus on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. (Tab 3)

### DISCUSSION

II. A. Tab 1 - U.S. Policy and the Bao Dai Regime

Tab 2 - Leverage: France Had More Than the United States

Tab 3 - Perceptions of the Communist Threat to Southeast Asia and to Basic U.S. Interests

II. A. 1.

UNITED STATES POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

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## II. A. 1. U.S. POLICY AND THE BAO DAI REGIME

### 1. The Bao Dai Solution

#### a. The French Predicament

French perceptions of the conflict which broke out in December, 1946, between their forces in Indochina and the Viet Minh forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) began to alternate between boundless optimism and unbridled gloom. In May, 1947, Minister of War Coste-Floret announced in Paris that: "There is no military problem any longer in Indochina...the success of French arms is complete." 1/ Within six months, though ambitious armored, amphibious, and airborne drives had plunged into the northern mountains and along the Annam coast, Viet Minh sabotage and raids along lines of communication had mounted steadily, and Paris had come to realize that France had lost the military initiative. In the meantime, the French launched political forays similarly ambitious and equally unproductive. Leon Pignon, political adviser to the French Commander in Indochina, and later High Commissioner, wrote in January, 1947, that:

"Our objective is clear: to transpose to the field of Vietnamese domestic politics the quarrel we have with the Viet Minh, and to involve ourselves as little as possible in the campaigns and reprisals which ought to be the work of the native adversaries of that party." 2/

Within a month, an emissary journeyed into the jungle to deliver to Ho Chi Minh's government demands tantamount to unconditional surrender. About the same time, French representatives approached Bao Dai, the former Emperor of Annam, with proposals that he undertake to form a Vietnamese government as an alternate to Ho Chi Minh's. Being unable to force a military resolution, and having foreclosed meaningful negotiations with Ho, the French turned to Bao Dai as their sole prospect for extrication from the growing dilemma in Vietnam.

#### b. The Ha Long Bay Agreement, 1948

Bao Dai's mandarin court in Hue, Annam, had been little more than an instrument of French colonial policy, and -- after the occupation by Japan -- of Japanese policy. Bao Dai had become Emperor at the age of 12, in 1925, but did not actually ascend the throne until 1932, after education in France. In August, 1945, when the Viet Minh arrived in Hue, he abdicated in favor of Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and accepted the post of "Supreme Adviser" to the new state. In 1946, he left Vietnam, and went to Hong Kong. There, he found himself solicited not only by French representatives, but by the DRV, who sought him to act on their behalf with the French.

Bao Dai attempted at first to maintain a central position between the two protagonists, but was soon persuaded to decline the Viet Minh overtures by non-Communist nationalists. A group of these, including members of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dong Minh Hoi, Dai Vet, and the VNQDD formed a National Union, and declared support for Bao Dai. One authority termed the National Union "a fragile coalition of discredited collaborators, ambitious masters of intrigue, incompetent sectarians, and a smattering of honest leaders without a following." Among the latter were Ngo Dinh Diem, who "for the first and only time, joined a party of which he was not the founder," and pledged to back the Emperor so long as he pursued independence for Vietnam. 3/ Now, having eliminated the Viet Minh support option, Bao Dai became more compliant in his discussions with the French, and the French became correspondingly stiffer in their attitude toward the Viet Minh. Yet, little came of the talks. On December 7, 1947, aboard a French warship in Ha Long Bay, Bao Dai signed an accord with the French, committing the French to Vietnamese political independence so minimally that it was promptly condemned not only by Diem, but also by more opportunistic colleagues in the National Union. Bao Dai, in what might have been a political withdrawal, removed himself from the developing intrigue, and fled to European pleasure centers for a four month jaunt which earned him the sobriquet "night club emperor."

The French, despite lack of cooperation from their elusive Vietnamese principal, sent diplomats to pursue Bao Dai and publicized their resolve "to carry on, outside the Ho Chi Minh Government, all activities and negotiations necessary for the restoration of peace and freedom in the Vietnamese countries" -- in effect, committing themselves to military victory and Bao Dai. 4/ French persistence eventually persuaded Bao Dai to return to Hong Kong, to endorse the formation of a Vietnamese national government prior to independence, and finally, to return to Vietnam as the Head of State. French negotiating pressures on him and the National Union included both spurious "leaks" of Franco-Viet Minh settlement talks, and further assurances of intentions to grant Vietnamese autonomy. On June 5, 1948, Bao Dai witnessed the signing of another Bay of Ha Long Agreement. Thereby, France publicly and "solemnly" recognized the independence of Vietnam -- but specifically retained control over foreign relations and the Army, and deferred transfer of other governmental functions to future negotiations; no authority was in fact transferred to the Vietnamese. Again Bao Dai retired to Europe, while in Hanoi the French assembled a transparently impotent semblance of native government. A second summer of war passed in 1948 without dispelling the military miasma over Indochina, and without making the "Bao Dai solution" any less repugnant among Vietnamese patriots. Opposition to it began to mount among French Leftists. This disenchantment, combined with a spreading acceptance of the strategic view that the Franco-Viet Minh war was a key anti-Communist struggle, influenced French leaders to liberalize their approach to the "Bao Dai solution."



c. Elysee Agreement, 1949

On March 8, 1949, after months of negotiations, French President Auriol, in an exchange of letters with Bao Dai, reconfirmed independence for Vietnam as an Associated State of the French Union and detailed procedures for unifying Vietnam and placing it under Vietnamese administration. Nonetheless, in the Elysee Agreement, France yielded control of neither Vietnam's army nor its foreign relations, and again postponed arrangements for virtually all other aspects of autonomy. However, Bao Dai, apparently convinced that France was now sufficiently desperate in Indochina that it would have to honor the Agreements, declared that:

"...An era of reconstruction and renovation will open in Vietnam. The country will be given democratic institutions that will be called on primarily to approve the present agreement....Profound economic and social reforms will be instituted to raise the general standard of living and to promote social justice, which is the condition and guarantee of order...[I look for] the union of all Vietnamese regardless of their political and religious tendencies, and the generous support of France on which I can count..." 5/

His public stance notwithstanding, Bao Dai delayed his return to Vietnam until a Cochinchinese Assembly had been elected (albeit in a farce of an election), and did not proceed to Saigon until the French Assembly had approved Cochinchina's joining the rest of Vietnam. In late June, 1949, Vietnam was legally united under Bao Dai, but the related alteration of administrative functions was slow, and usually only pro forma; no genuine power or authority was turned over to the Vietnamese. The State of Vietnam became a camouflage for continued French rule in Indochina. As Bao Dai himself characterized the situation in 1950, "What they call a Bao Dai solution turned out to be just a French solution....The situation in Indochina is getting worse every day..." 6/

d. Bao Dai's Governments

The unsavory elements of the coalition supporting Bao Dai dominated his regime. Ngo Dinh Diem and a few other upright nationalists refused high government posts, and withdrew their support from Bao Dai when their expectations of autonomy were disappointed. Diem's public statement criticized the probity of those who did accept office:

"The national aspirations of the Vietnamese people will be satisfied only on the day when our nation obtains the same political regime which India and Pakistan enjoy... I believe it is only just to reserve the best posts in the new Vietnam for those who have deserved best of the country; I speak of those who resist..." 7/

However, far from looking to the "resistance," Bao Dai chose his leaders from among men with strong identification with France, often men of great and dubious wealth, or with ties with the sub-worlds of French neo-mercantilism and Viet vice. None commanded a popular following. General Georges Revers, Chief of Staff of the French Army, who was sent to Vietnam to appraise the situation in May and June, 1949, wrote that:

"If Ho Chi Minh has been able to hold off French intervention for so long, it is because the Viet Minh leader has surrounded himself with a group of men of incontestable worth... [Bao Dai, by contrast, had] a government composed of twenty representatives of phantom parties, the best organized of which would have difficulty in rallying twenty-five adherents..." 8/

Bao Dai himself did next to nothing to make his government either more representative or more efficient. He divided his time among the pleasures of the resort towns of Dalat, Nha Trang, and Banmethuout, and for all practical purposes, remained outside the process of government.

An American diplomat serving in Vietnam at the time who knew Bao Dai well, characterized him in these terms:

"Bao Dai, above all, was an intelligent man. Intellectually, he could discuss the complex details of the various agreements and of the whole involved relationship with France as well as or better than anyone I knew. But he was a man who was crippled by his French upbringing. His manner was too impassive. He allowed himself to be sold by the French on an erroneous instead of a valid evolutionary concept, and this suited his own temperament. He was too congenial, and he was almost pathologically shy, which was one reason he always liked to wear dark glasses. He would go through depressive cycles, and when he was depressed, he would dress himself in Vietnamese clothes instead of European ones, and would mince no words about the French. His policy, he said to me on one of these dour occasions, was one of 'grignotage,' or 'nibbling,' and he was painfully aware of it. The French, of course, were never happy that we Americans had good relations with Bao Dai, and they told him so. Unfortunately, they also had some blackmail on him, about his relationship with gambling enterprises in Saigon and his love of the fleshpots." 9/

Whatever his virtues, Bao Dai was not a man who could earn the fealty of the Vietnamese peasants. He could not even hold the loyalty of honest nationalists, one of whom, for example, was Dr. Phan Quang Dan -- a prominent and able non-Communist leader and early supporter of the "solution,"



and a personal friend of Bao Dai -- (Dr. Dan later was the opposition leader of the Diem era). Dr. Dan reported a touching conversation with Bao Dai's mother in which she described her son at a loss to know whom to trust, and heartsick at the atmosphere of hostility which surrounded him. 10/ Yet Dr. Dan resigned as Bao Dai's Minister of Information over the Elysee Agreement, and, though he remained close to the Emperor, would not reassume public office for him. Bao Dai himself furnished an apt description of his political philosophy which may explain why he failed to capture the hearts of either beleaguered farmers or serious political leaders -- neither of whom could stomach "nibbling" when revolution was required. Said Bao Dai:

"To practice politics is like playing a game, and I have always considered life a game." 11/

e. The Pau Negotiations, 1950

Yet Bao Dai did work at pressing the French. French officials in fact complained to an American writer that Bao Dai spent too much of his time on such pursuits:

"He has concentrated too much on getting what he can from us instead of building up his support among the people of the country...History will judge if he did right in putting so much stress on that..." 12/

From late June, 1950, until the end of November, Bao Dai stayed close to the series of conferences in Pau, France, designed to arrange the transfer to the Vietnamese of the services of immigration, communications, foreign trade, customs, and finances. The issue of the finance service was a particularly thorny one, involving as it did lucrative foreign exchange controls. While the French did eventually grant significant concessions to the Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians in each area discussed, they preserved "rights of observation" and "intervention" in matters that "concerned the French Union as a whole." Indeed, the French assured themselves full access to government information, license to participate in all government decisions, and little reduction in economic benefits. 13/

Some French commentators viewed Pau as an unmitigated disaster and the assurance of an early French demise in Indochina. As one writer put it:

"By accepting the eventual restriction of trade within the French Union, by losing all effective authority over the issuance of money, by renouncing control over foreign trade, by permitting a system of controlled prices for exports and imports, we have given the Associated States all the power they need if they wish to assure the ruin of our enterprises and compel their withdrawal without in any way molesting our compatriots." 14/

But a contemporary Vietnamese critic took a quite different view:

"All these conventions conserve in Indochina a privileged position for French capital, supported by the presence of a powerful fleet and army. Even if no one talks any more of an Indochinese Federation, it is still a federalism both administrative and economic (Monetary Union, Customs Union, Communications Union, etc.) which co-ordinates the various activities of the three Associated States. France always exercises control through the representatives she has in all the organs of planning or of federal surveillance, and through what is in effect the right of veto, because the president or the secretary general of these committees is always elected by joint decision of the four governments and, further, because most of the decisions of the committees are made by unanimous agreement."

(Quoted in same reference above)

Bao Dai's delegates were, however, generally pleased with the outcome of Pau. His Prime Minister, Tran Van Huu declared as he signed the conventions that "our independence is now perfect." But to the ordinary Vietnamese, to honest Frenchmen, and to the Americans, Tran Van Huu was proved dramatically wrong.



## 2. U.S. Policy Towards Bao Dai

### a. Qualified Approval, 1947-1950

The "Bao Dai solution" depended on American support. During the 1950 negotiations in Pau, France, Bao Dai's Prime Minister Tran Van Huu was called back to Indochina by a series of French military reverses in Tonkin. Tran Van Huu seized the occasion to appeal to the United States "as the leading democratic nation," and hoped that the U.S. would

"... bring pressure to bear on France in order to achieve democratic freedom. We want the right to decide our own affairs for ourselves." 15/

Tran demanded the Elysee Agreement be superseded by genuine autonomy for Vietnam:

"It is not necessary for young men to die so that a French engineer can be director of the port of Saigon. Many people are dying every day because Viet Nam is not given independence. If we had independence the people would have no more reason to fight."

Tran's addressing the U.S. thus was realistic, if not judicious, for the U.S. had already become involved in Indochina as one part of a troubled triangle with France and Bao Dai's regime. Indeed, there had been an American role in the "Bao Dai solution" from its inception. Just before the Ha Long Bay Agreements, the French initiative had received some support from a December, 1947, Life magazine article by William C. Bullitt, former U.S. Ambassador to France. Bullitt argued for a policy aimed at ending "the saddest war" by winning the majority of Vietnamese nationalists away from Ho Chi Minh and from the Communists through a movement built around Bao Dai. 16/ Bullitt's views were widely accepted in France as a statement of U.S. policy, and a direct endorsement, and promise of U.S. aid, for Bao Dai. Bao Dai, whether he accepted the Bullitt canard or not, seemed to sense that the U.S. would inevitably be drawn into Southeast Asia, and apparently expected American involvement to be accompanied by U.S. pressure on France on behalf of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S., though it appreciated France's dilemma, was reluctant initially to endorse the Bao Dai solution until it became a reality. The following State Department messages indicate the U.S. position:

July 10, 1948 (Paris 3621 to State):

"... France is faced with alternatives of unequivocally and promptly approving principle [of] Viet independence within French union and [the] union [of the] three parts of Vietnam or losing Indochina."

July 14, 1948 (State 2637 to Paris):

"... Once Bay of Ha Long Agreement together with change in status of Cochinchina is approved, Department would be disposed to consider lending its support to extent of publicly approving French Government's action as forward looking step toward settlement of troubled situation in Indochina and toward realization of aspirations Vietnamese people. It appears to Department that above stated U.S. approval would materially assist in strengthening hands of nationalists as opposed to communists in Indochina..."

August 30, 1948 (State 3368 to Paris):

"Department appreciates difficulties facing any French Government taking decisive action vis-a-vis Indochina, but can only see steadily deteriorating situation unless there is more positive approval Bay of Ha Long Agreement, enactment legislation or action permitting change Cochinchina status, and immediate commencement formal negotiations envisaged that Agreement. Department believes that nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group. No such inducement possible unless that group can show concrete evidence that French are prepared to implement promptly creation Vietnamese free state which is associated with the French Union and with all attributes free state..."

January 17, 1949 (State 145 to Paris):

"While Department desirous French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has reasonable chance winning over preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrevably sic commit U.S. to support of native government which by failing develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually puppet government, separated from people, and existing only by presence French military forces..."

The Elysee Agreement took place in March, 1949. At this juncture, the fall of China obtruded, and the U.S. began to view the "Bao Dai solution" with a greater sense of urgency:

May 10, 1949 (State 77 to Saigon):

"Assumption ... Department desires the success Bao Dai experiment entirely correct. Since there appears to be no other alternative to established Commie pattern in Vietnam, Department considers no effort should be spared by France, other Western powers, and non-Commie Asian nations to assure experiment best chance succeeding.



"At proper time and under proper circumstances Department will be prepared [to] do its part by extending recognition [to the] Bao Dai Government and by exploring [the] possibility of complying with any request by such a Government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. [It] must be understood, however, [that] aid program this nature would require Congressional approval. Since U.S. could scarcely afford backing [a] government which would have color [of], and be likely [to] suffer the fate of, [a] puppet regime, it must first be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make Bao Dai solution attractive to nationalists.

"This is [a] step of which French themselves must see urgency [and] necessity [in] view possibly short time remaining before Commie successes [in] China are felt [in] Indochina. Moreover, Bao Dai Government must through own efforts demonstrate capacity [to] organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to ensure maximum opportunity of obtaining requisite popular support, inasmuch as [any] government created in Indochina analogous [to the] Kuomintang would be foredoomed failure.

"Assuming essential French concessions are forthcoming, best chance [of] success [for] Bao Dai would appear to be in persuading Vietnamese nationalists:

- (1) their patriotic aims may be realized promptly through French-Bao Dai agreement
- (2) Bao Dai government will be truly representative even to the extent of including outstanding non-Commie leaders now supporting Ho, and
- (3) Bao Dai solution [is the] only means [of] safeguarding Vietnam from aggressive designs [of] the Commie Chinese."

Through 1949, the southward march of Mao's legions continued, and the Viet Minh were obviously preparing to establish relations with them.

#### b. Recognition, 1950

The Elysee Agreements were eleven months old before the U.S. considered that France had taken the concrete steps toward Vietnamese autonomy which the U.S. had set as conditions for recognizing Bao Dai. In late January, 1950, events moved swiftly. Ho Chi Minh announced that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnam people" and indicated DRV willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." Mao responded promptly with recognition, followed by Stalin.

In France there was an acrimonious debate in the National Assembly between leftist advocates of immediate truce with the Viet Minh and government supporters of the Elysee Agreement to proceed with the Bao Dai solution. René Plevén, Minister of National Defense, declared that: 17/

"It is necessary that the French people know that at the present time the only true enemy of peace in Viet Nam is the Communist Party. Because members of the Communist Party know that peace in Indochina will be established by the policy of independence that we are following."

("Peace with Viet Nam! Peace with Viet Nam!" shouted the Communists.)

Jean Letourneau arose to assert that:

"It is not at all a question of approving or disapproving a government; we are very far beyond the transitory life of a government in an affair of this gravity. It is necessary that, on the international level, the vote that takes place tonight reveals truly the major importance that this event should have in the eyes of the entire world."

Frédéric Dupont said:

"The Indochina war has always been a test of the French Union before international Communism. But since the arrival of the Chinese Communists on the frontier of Tonkin, Indochina has become the frontier of Western civilization and the war in Indochina is integrated into the cold war."

Premier Georges Bidault was the last speaker:

"The choice is simple. Moreover there is no choice."

The National Assembly vote on January 29, 1950, was 396 to 193. From the extreme left there were cries of "Down with the war!" and Paul Coste-Floret replied: "Long live peace." On February 2, 1950, France's formal ratification of the independence of Vietnam was announced.

The U.S. assessment of the situation, and its action, is indicated in the following:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-15 and A-16)



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington

February 2, 1950

RESTRICTED

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: U.S. Recognition of Vietnam,  
Laos and Cambodia

1. The French Assembly (Lower House) ratified on 29 January by a large majority (396 - 193) the bill which, in effect, established Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as autonomous states within the French Union. The opposition consisted of 181 Communist votes with only 12 joining in from other parties. The Council of the Republic (Senate) is expected to pass the bills by the same approximate majority on or about February 3. President Auriol's signature is expected to follow shortly thereafter.

2. The French legislative and political steps thus taken will transform areas which were formerly governed as Protectorates or Colonies into states within the French Union, with considerably more freedom than they enjoyed under their prior status. The French Government has indicated that it hopes to grant greater degrees of independence to the three states as the security position in Indochina allows, and as the newly formed governments become more able to administer the areas following withdrawal of the French.

3. Within Laos and Cambodia there are no powerful movements directed against the governments which are relatively stable. However, Vietnam has been the battleground since the end of World War II of conflicting political parties and military forces. Ho Chi Minh, who under various aliases, has been a communist agent in various parts of the world since 1925 and was able to take over the anti-French nationalist movement in 1945. After failing to reach agreement with the French regarding the establishment of an autonomous state of Vietnam, he withdrew his forces to the jungle and hill areas of

Vietnam

RESTRICTED

Vietnam and has harassed the French ever since. His followers who are estimated at approximately 75,000 armed men, with probably the same number unarmed. His headquarters are unknown.

The French counter efforts have included, on the military side, the deployment of approximately 130,000 troops, of whom the approximately 50,000 are local natives serving voluntarily, African colonials, and a hard core made up of French troops and Foreign Legion units. Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla tactics have been aimed at denying the French control of Vietnam. On March 8, 1949 the French President signed an agreement with Bao Dai as the Head of State, granting independence within the French Union to the Government of Vietnam. Similar agreements were signed with the King of Laos and the King of Cambodia.

Recent developments have included Chinese Communist victories bringing those troops to the Indochina border; recognition of Ho Chi Minh as the head of the legal Government of Vietnam by Communist China (18 January) and by Soviet Russia (30 January).

4. Recognition by the United States of the three legally constituted governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia appears desirable and in accordance with United States foreign policy for several reasons. Among them are: encouragement to national aspirations under non-Communist leadership for peoples of colonial areas in Southeast Asia; the establishment of stable non-Communist governments in areas adjacent to Communist China; support to a friendly country which is also a signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty; and as a demonstration of displeasure with Communist tactics which are obviously aimed at eventual domination of Asia, working under the guise of indigenous nationalism.

Subject to your approval, the Department of State recommends that the United States of America extend recognition to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, following ratification by the French Government.

(signed) DEAN ACHESON

Approved

9(signed)

Harry S. Truman

February 3, 1950



c. U.S. Aid to Indochina

On February 16, 1950, France requested U.S. military and economic assistance in prosecuting the Indochina War. 18/ The Secretary of Defense in a Memorandum for the President on March 6 stated that:

"The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." 19/

The same month, the State Department dispatched an aid survey mission under R. Allen Griffin to Indochina (and to Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaya). The Griffin Mission proposed (inter alia) aid for the Bao Dai government, since the State of Vietnam was considered:

"... not secure against internal subversion, political infiltration, or military aggression.

"The objective of each program is to assist as much as possible in building strength, and in so doing ... to assure the several peoples that support of their governments and resistance to communist subversion will bring them direct and tangible benefits and well-founded hope for an increase in living standards. Accordingly, the programs are of two main types: (1) technical and material aid to essential services and (2) economic rehabilitation and development, focused primarily on the provision of technical assistance and material aid in developing agricultural and industrial output. ... These activities are to be carried on in a way best calculated to demonstrate that the local national governments are able to bring benefits to their own people and thereby build political support, especially among the rural population....

"The aims of economic assistance to Southeast Asia ... are to reinforce the non-Communist national governments in that region by quickly strengthening and expanding the economic life of the area, improve the conditions under which its people live, and demonstrate concretely the genuine interest of the United States in the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia." 20/

In a strategic assessment of Southeast Asia in April, 1950, the JCS recommended military assistance for Indochina, provided:

"... that United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs..." 21/

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved \$10 million for urgently needed military assistance items for Indochina. 22/ The President's

decision was taken in the context of the successful amphibious invasion of Nationalist-defended Hainan by a Communist Chinese army under General Lin Piao -- with obvious implications for Indochina, and for Taiwan. One week later, on May 8, the Secretary of State announced U.S. aid for "the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." 23/ Sixteen days later, Bao Dai's government and France were notified on May 24 of the U.S. intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States. As the North Korean Army moved southward on June 27, 1950, President Truman announced that he had directed "acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina..." 24/

The crucial issue presented by the American decision to provide aid to Indochina was who should be the recipient -- Bao Dai or France -- and, hence, whose policies would U.S. aid support?

#### d. French Intransigence

While the U.S. was deliberating over whether to provide economic and military assistance to Indochina in early 1950, negotiations opened at Pau, France, among France and the Associated States to set the timing and extent of granting autonomy. Had these talks led to genuine independence for Bao Dai's regime, the subsequent U.S.-French relationship would probably have been much less complex and significantly less acerbic. As it was, however, the Pau accords led to little more independence than had the Ha Long Bay or Elysee Agreements. Moreover, France's reluctance to yield political or economic authority to Bao Dai was reinforced by its proclivity to field strong-willed commanders, suspicious of the U.S., determined on a military victory, and scornful of the Bao Dai solution. General Marcel Carpentier, Commander in Chief when the French applied for aid, was quoted in the New York Times on March 9, 1950, as follows:

"I will never agree to equipment being given directly to the Vietnamese. If this should be done I would resign within twenty-four hours. The Vietnamese have no generals, no colonels, no military organization that could effectively utilize the equipment. It would be wasted, and in China the United States has had enough of that." 25/

#### (1) 1950-1951: De Lattre and "Dynamisme"

Carpentier's successor, High Commissioner-Commander in Chief General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, arrived in December, 1950, following the severe setback of the autumn. De Lattre electrified the discouraged French forces like General Ridgway later enheartened U.S. forces in Korea. De Lattre saw himself as leading an anti-communist crusade. He calculated that he could win a decisive victory within fifteen months in Vietnam, and "save it from Peking and Moscow." He deprecated the idea that the French were still motivated by colonialism, and even told one U.S. newsman that France fought for the West alone:



"We have no more interest here... We have abandoned all our colonial positions completely. There is little rubber or coal or rice we can any longer obtain. And what does it amount to compared to the blood of our sons we are losing and the three hundred and fifty million francs we spend a day in Indochina? The work we are doing is for the salvation of the Vietnamese people. And the propaganda you Americans make that we are still colonialists is doing us tremendous harm, all of us -- the Vietnamese, yourselves, and us." 26/

Moreover, De Lattre was convinced that the Vietnamese had to be brought into the fight. In a speech -- "A Call to Vietnamese Youth" -- he declared:

"This war, whether you like it or not, is the war of Vietnam for Vietnam. And France will carry it on for you only if you carry it on with her.... Certain people pretend that Vietnam cannot be independent because it is part of the French Union. Not true! In our universe, and especially in our world of today, there can be no nations absolutely independent. There are only fruitful interdependencies and harmful dependencies.... Young men of Vietnam, to whom I feel as close as I do to the youth of my native land, the moment has come for you to defend your country." 27/

Yet, General De Lattre regarded U.S. policy vis-a-vis Bao Dai with grave misgivings. Americans, he held, afflicted with "missionary zeal," were "fanning the fires of extreme nationalism... French traditionalism is vital here. You cannot, you must not destroy it. No one can simply make a new nation overnight by giving out economic aid and arms alone." 28/ As adamantly as Carpentier, De Lattre opposed direct U.S. aid for Vietnamese forces, and allowed the Vietnamese military little real independence.

Edmund A. Gullion, U.S. Minister Counselor in Saigon from 1950 on, faulted De Lattre on his inability to stimulate in the Vietnamese National Army either the elan vital or dynamisme he communicated to the rest of the French Expeditionary Corps:

"... It remained difficult to inculcate nationalist ardor in a native army whose officers and non-coms were primarily white Frenchmen... The Vietnamese units that went into action were rarely unsupported by the French. American contact with them was mainly through the French, who retained exclusive responsibility for their training. We felt we needed much more documentation than we had to assess the army's true potential. We needed battalion-by-battalion reports on the performance of the Vietnamese in training as well as in battle and a close contact with intelligence and command echelons, and we never got this. Perhaps the most significant and saddest manifestation of the French failure to create a really independent Vietnamese Army

that would fight in the way de Lattre meant was the absence, at Dienbienphu, of any Vietnamese fighting elements. It was a French show." 29/

Gullion is not altogether correct with respect to Dien Bien Phu; nonetheless, statistics on the ethnic composition of the defending garrison do reveal the nature of the problem. The 5th Vietnamese Parachute Battalion was dropped to reinforce the garrison so that as of May 6, 1954, the troops at Dien Bien Phu included: 30/

Garrison of Dien Bien Phu

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>NCO's</u>	<u>EM's</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Vietnamese	<u>11</u>	<u>270</u>	<u>5,119</u>	<u>5,480</u>
Total	393	1,666	13,026	15,105
Viet % of Total	2.8	16.2	39.2	36.2

Thus, the Vietnamese comprised more than a third of the fighting forces (and nearly 40% of the enlisted troops); but among the leaders, they provided one-sixth of the non-commissioned officers and less than 3% of the officers.

The paucity of Viet officers at Dien Bien Phu reflected the general condition of the National Army: as of 1953, there were 2,600 native officers, of whom only a handful held rank above major, compared to 7,000 French officers in a force of 150,000 Vietnamese troops. 31/

(2) 1951-1953: Letourneau and "Dictatorship"

De Lattre's successor as High Commissioner, Jean Letourneau, was also the French Cabinet Minister for the Associated States. Letourneau was sent to Indochina to assume the same power and privilege in the "independent" State of Vietnam that any of France's Governor Generals had ever exercised from Saigon's Norodom Palace. In May, 1953, a French Parliamentary Mission of Inquiry accused the Minister-High Commissioner of "veritable dictatorship, without limitation or control":

"The artificial life of Saigon, the temptations of power without control, the security of a judgment which disdains realities, have isolated the Minister and his entourage and have made them insensible to the daily tragedy of the war ...

"It is no longer up to us to govern, but to advise. The big thing was not to draw up plans irresponsibly, but to carry on daily a subtle diplomacy. In Saigon our representatives have allowed themselves to be inveigled into the tempting game of power and intrigue.



"Instead of seeing the most important things and acting on them, instead of making on the spot investigations, of looking for inspiration in the village and in the ricefield, instead of informing themselves and winning the confidence of the most humble people, in order to deprive the rebels of their best weapon, the Norodom Palace clique has allowed itself the luxury of administering à la française and of reigning over a country where revolution is smouldering ...

"The press has not the right of criticism. To tell the truth, it has become official, and the principal newspaper in Saigon is at the disposition of the High Commissariat. Letters are censored. Propaganda seems to be issued just to defend the High Commissariat. Such a regime cannot last, unless we are to appear as people who are determined not to keep their promises." 32/

The Parliamentary Mission described Saigon: "where gambling, depravity, love of money and of power finish by corrupting the morale and destroying will-power ..."; and the Vietnamese government: "The Ministers [of the Bao Dai regime] appear in the eyes of their compatriots to be French officials ...". The report did not hesitate to blame the French for Vietnamese corruption:

"It is grave that after eight years of laissez-aller and of anarchy, the presence in Indochina of a resident Minister has not been able to put an end to these daily scandals in the life in regard to the granting of licenses, the transfer of piastres, war damages, or commercial transactions. Even if our administration is not entirely responsible for these abuses, it is deplorable that one can affirm that it either ignores them or tolerates them." 33/

Commenting on this report, an influential French editor blamed the "natural tendency of the military proconsulate to perpetuate itself" and "certain French political groups who have found in the war a principal source of their revenues ... through exchange operations, supplies to the expeditionary corps and war damages ..." 34/ He concluded that:

"The generally accepted theory is that the prolongation of the war in Indochina is a fatality imposed by events, one of those dramas in history which has no solution. The theory of the skeptics is that the impotence or the errors of the men responsible for our policy in Indochina have prevented us from finding a way out of this catastrophic enterprise. The truth is that the facts now known seem to add up to a lucid plan worked out step by step to eliminate any possibility of negotiation in Indochina in order to assure the prolongation without limit of the hostilities and of the military occupation." 35/

e. Bao Dai, Attentiste

Despite U.S. recognition of the grave imperfections of the French administration in Vietnam, the U.S. was constrained to deal with the Indochina situation through France both by the overriding importance of its European policy and by the impotence and ineptitude of the Bao Dai regime. The U.S. attempted to persuade Bao Dai to exercise more vigorous leadership, but the Emperor chose differently. For example, immediately after the Pau negotiations, the Department of State sent these instructions to Edmund Gullion:

(telegram reproduced on pages A-23 thru A-25)



OUTGOING TELEGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SECRET

OCT 18 1950  
2 P.M.

PRIORITY

AMLEGATION

SAIGON

384

DEPT wishes to have FOL MSG delivered to Bao Dai personally by MIN IMMED after Chief of State's arrival in Saigon. It SHLD be delivered informally without submission written text with sufficient emphasis to leave no doubt in Emperor's mind that it represents DEPT'S studied opinion in matter now receiving ATTN highest auths US GOVT. Begin MSG:

Bao Dai will arrive in Saigon at moment when Vietnam is facing grave crisis outcome of which may decide whether country will be permitted develop independence status or pass in near future to one of Sino-Soviet dominated satellite, a new form of colony immeasurably worse than the old from which Vietnam has so recently separated herself.

The US GOVT is at present moment taking steps to increase the AMT of aid to FR Union and ASSOC States in their effort to defend the territorial integrity of IC and prevent the incorporation of the ASSOC States within the COMINT-dominated bloc of slave states but even the resources of US are strained by our present UN commitments in Korea, the need for aid in the defense of Western Europe and our own rearmament program. We sometimes find it impossible to furnish aid as we WLD wish in a given AMT at a given time and in a given place.

SECRET

A-23

Leadership of Vietnam GOVT during this crucial period is a factor of preponderant importance in deciding ultimate outcome. GOVT must display unusually aggressive leadership and courage before a discouraged people, distraught and floundering in the wake of years of civil war. Lesser considerations concerning the modalities of relations between the States of the FR Union and the REP of FR must, for instance, be at least temporarily laid aside in face of serious threat to very existence of Vietnam as autonomous state, within FR Union or otherwise.

We are aware (as is Bao Dai) that present Vietnamese GOVT is so linked with person of Chief of State that leadership and example provided by latter takes on extraordinary importance in determining degree of efficiency in functioning of GOVT. Through circumstances of absence in FR of Bao Dai and other Vietnamese leaders for prolonged period, opportunity for progress in assumption of responsibilities from FR and extension authority and influence of GOVT with people was neglected. Many people, including great number AMERS, have been unable understand reasons for Emperor's GTE prolonged holiday UNQTE on Riviera and have misinterpreted it as an indication of lack of patriotic attachment to his role of Chief of State. DEPT is at least of opinion that his absence did not enhance the authority and prestige of his GOVT at home.

Therefore, DEPT considers it imperative Bao Dai give Vietnamese people evidence his determination personally take up reins of state and lead his country into IMMED and energetic opposition COMBIE menace. Specifically he SHLD embark upon IMMED program of visits to all parts Vietnam making numerous speeches and public apperances in the process. Chief of State SHLD declare his determination plunge into job of rallying people to support of GOVT and opposition to VM IMMED upon arrival Saigon. He SHLD announce US, FR support for formation NATL armies and his own intention assume role Commander in Chief. He SHLD take full advantage of FR official declaration of intention to form NATL armies (confirmed yesterday by MIN ASSC States Letcurneau) and set up precise plan for such formation IMMED.



Finally, it SHLD be tactfully suggested that any further display procrastination in facing realities in the form prolonged periods of seclusion at Dalat or otherwise WLD confirm impressions of those not as convinced of Emperor's seriousness of purpose as DEPT and LEG are and raise questions of the wisdom of continuing to support a Vietnamese GOVT which proves itself incapable of exercising the autonomy acquired by it at such a high price. End of MSG.

Endeavor obtain private interview soonest possible after arrival for DEPT regards timing as of prime importance. Simultaneously or IMMED FOL inform Letourneau and Pignon of action. Saigon advise Paris in advance to synchronize informing FONOFF

ACHESON

Whatever Bao Dai's response -- probably polite and obscure -- he did not act on the U.S. advice. He subsequently told Dr. Phan Quang Dan, aboard his imperial yacht, that his successive governments had been of little use, and added that it would be dangerous to expand the Vietnamese Army because it might defect en masse and go to the Viet Minh.

"I could not inspire the troops with the necessary enthusiasm and fighting spirit, nor could Prime Minister Huu... Even if we had an able man, the present political conditions would make it impossible for him to convince the people and the troops that they have something worth while to fight for..." 36/

Dr. Dan agreed that the effectiveness of the National Army was a central issue; he pointed out that there were but three Viet generals, none of whom had ever held operational command, and neither they nor the 20 colonels or lieutenant colonels could exercise initiative of any sort. Dr. Dan held that: "The Vietnamese Army is without responsible Vietnamese leaders, without ideology, without objective, without enthusiasm, without fighting spirit, and without popular backing." 37/ But it was very clear that Bao Dai did not propose to alter the conditions of his army except by the long, slow process of "nibbling" at French military prerogative. On other vital issues Bao Dai was no more aggressive. For all practical purposes, the Emperor, in his own fashion, like Dr. Dan and Ngo Dinh Diem, assumed the posture of the attentiste -- a spectator as the French and Americans tested their strength against each other, and against the Viet Minh.

#### f. The American Predicament

Among the American leaders who understood the vacuity of the Bao Dai solution, and recognized the pitfalls in French intransigence on genuine independence was the then Senator John F. Kennedy. Kennedy visited Vietnam in 1951 and evidently weighed Gullion's views heavily. In November, 1951, Kennedy declared that:

"In Indochina we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of the French regime to hang on to the remnants of an empire. There is no broad general support of the native Vietnam Government among the people of that area." 38/

In a speech to the U.S. Senate in June, 1953, he pointed out that:

"Genuine independence as we understand it is lacking in Indochina ... local government is circumscribed in its functions ... the government of Vietnam, the state which is of the greatest importance in this area, lacks popular support, that the degree of military, civil, political, and economic control maintained by the French goes well beyond what is necessary to fight a war... It is because we want the war to be brought to a successful conclusion that we should insist



on genuine independence... Regardless of our united effort, it is a truism that the war can never be successful unless large numbers of the people of Vietnam are won over from their sullen neutrality and open hostility to it and fully support its successful conclusion... I strongly believe that the French cannot succeed in Indochina without giving concessions necessary to make the native army a reliable and crusading force." 39/

Later, Kennedy criticized the French:

"Every year we are given three sets of assurances: first, that the independence of the Associated States is now complete; second, that the independence of the Associated States will soon be completed under steps 'now' being taken; and third, that military victory for the French Union forces is assured, or is just around the corner." 40/

Another American knowledgeable concerning the U.S.-French difficulties and with the Bao Dai solution was Robert Blum, who headed the economic aid program extended to the Bao Dai regime in 1950. General De Lattre viewed U.S. economic aid as especially pernicious, and told Blum that: "Mr. Blum, you are the most dangerous man in Indochina." 41/ De Lattre resented the American intrusion. "As a student of history, I can understand it, but as a Frenchman I don't like it." In 1952, Blum analyzed the Bao Dai-French-American triangle as follows:

"The attitude of the French is difficult to define. On the one hand are the repeated official affirmations that France has no selfish interests in Indochina and desires only to promote the independence of the Associated States and be relieved of the terrible drain of France's resources. On the other hand are the numerous examples of the deliberate continuation of French controls, the interference in major policy matters, the profiteering and the constant bickering and ill-feeling over the transfer of powers and the issues of independence... There is unquestionably a contradiction in French actions between the natural desire to be rid of this unpopular, costly and apparently fruitless war and the determination to see it through with honor while satisfying French pride and defending interests in the process. This distinction is typified by the sharp difference between the attitude toward General de Lattre in Indochina, where he is heralded as the political genius and military savior ... and in France, where he is suspected as a person who for personal glory is drawing off France's resources on a perilous adventure...

"It is difficult to measure what have been the results of almost two years of active American participation in the affairs of Indochina. Although we embarked upon a course of uneasy association with the 'colonialist'-tainted but

indispensable French, on the one hand, and the indigenous, weak and divided Vietnamese, on the other hand, we have not been able fully to reconcile these two allies in the interest of a single-minded fight against Communism. Of the purposes which we hoped to serve by our actions in Indochina, the one that has been most successful has been the strengthening of the French military position. On the other hand, the Vietnamese, many of whom thought that magical solutions to their advantage would result from our appearance on the scene, are chastened but disappointed at the evidence that America is not omnipotent and not prepared to make an undiluted effort to support their point of view... Our direct influence on political and economic matters has not been great. We have been reluctant to become directly embroiled and, though the degree of our contribution has been steadily increasing, we have been content, if not eager, to have the French continue to have primary responsibility, and to give little, if any, advice." 42/

Blum concluded that:

"The situation in Indochina is not satisfactory and shows no substantial prospect of improving, that no decisive military victory can be achieved, that the Bao Dai government gives little promise of developing competence and winning the loyalty of the population ... and that the attainment of American objectives is remote." 43/

Shortly before his death in 1965, Blum held that a clash of French and U.S. interests was inevitable:

"We wanted to strengthen the ability of the French to protect the area against Communist infiltration and invasion, and we wanted to capture the nationalist movement from the Communists by encouraging the national aspirations of the local populations and increasing popular support of their governments. We knew that the French were unpopular, that the war that had been going on since 1946 was not only a nationalist revolt against them but was an example of the awakening self-consciousness of the peoples of Asia who were trying to break loose from domination by the Western world. We recognized right away that two-pronged policy was beset with great difficulties. Because of the prevailing anti-French feeling, we knew that any bolstering by us of the French position would be resented by the local people. And because of the traditional French position, and French sensitivity at seeing any increase of American influence, we knew they would look with suspicion upon the development of direct American relations with local administrations and peoples. Nevertheless, we were determined that our aid program would not be used as a means of forcing



co-ordination upon unwilling governments, and we were equally determined that our emphasis would be on types of aid that would appeal to the masses of the population and not on aid that, while economically more sophisticated, would be less readily understood. Ours was a political program that worked with the people and it would obviously have lost most of its effectiveness if it had been reduced to a role of French-protected anonymity ... [The program was] greatly handicapped and its beneficial psychological results were largely negated because the United States at the same time was pursuing a program of [military] support to the French ... on balance, we came to be looked upon more as a supporter of colonialism than as a friend of the new nation." 44/

In 1965, Edmund Gullion, who was also very close to the Bao Dai problem, took this retrospect:

"We really should have pushed the French right after the Elysee agreements of March, 1949. We did not consider the exchange of letters carefully enough at the time. It was understandable. We obviously felt it was going to be a continuing process, and we hoped to be able to have some influence over it. But then we got involved in Korea, and since the French were in trouble in Indochina, we pulled our punches... The French could have said unequivocally, as we did with regard to the Philippines, that in such-and-such a number of years Vietnam would be totally free, and that it could thereupon join the French Union or stay out, as it desired... An evolutionary solution was the obvious one, and it should have been confronted openly and honestly without all the impossible, protracted preliminary negotiations involving efforts to bring the three Associated States together, to get them to agree among each other, and with France, separately and collectively. The French, in arguing against any kind of bilateral agreements, claimed that their attempt at federation in Indochina was like our effort to build some sort of federated system in Europe. But their involvement and interest in Indochina was obviously different, and they used the formula they devised to avoid any real agreement on Vietnam. The problem grew more complex as the military and political aspects of the situation became unavoidably tied together, and the Korean War, of course, complicated it further. From the outset, the French sought to regard the war in Korea and the war in Indochina as related parts of one big fight against Communism, but it wasn't that simple. Actually, what the Korean War did do was make it more difficult for us to urge an evolutionary settlement in Vietnam. By 1951, it may have been too late for us to do anything about this, but we could still have tried much harder than we did. The trouble was the world by then had begun to close in on us. The E.D.C. formula in Europe was being rejected by the French, just as in 1965 they were rejecting the

North Atlantic Treaty Organization concept. Our degree of leverage was being drastically reduced." 45/

Had Bao Dai been willing or capable of more effective leadership, the U.S. role in the war might not have fallen into what Edmund Gullion called the "pattern of prediction and disappointment":

"It can be timed almost to the month to coincide with the rainy season and the campaign season. Thus, in May or June, we usually get French estimates of success in the coming campaign season, based partly on an assessment of losses the Vietminh are supposed to have suffered in the preceding fall, which are typically claimed as the bright spot in an otherwise gloomy fighting season. The new set of estimates soon proves equally disappointing; by October, French Union troops are found bottled up in mountain defiles far from their bases... There are rumblings about late or lacking American aid and lack of American understanding. Some time around the first of the new year, special high-level United States-French conferences are called. We ask some questions about the military situation but only a few about the political situation. There is widespread speculation that the French may pull out of Indochina if we press them for explanations of their political and economic program. We promise the French more aid. The French make a stand: they claim great casualties inflicted on the enemy. They give us new estimates for the following campaign season -- and the round begins once more." 46/

In that bleak pattern, Bao Dai played only a passive role; the "Bao Dai solution" ultimately solved nothing. The outcome rested rather on France's military struggle with the Viet Minh, and its contest of leverage with the United States.



II. A. 2.

LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

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## II. A. 2. LEVERAGE: FRANCE HAD MORE THAN THE UNITED STATES

It is sometimes asserted that France could not have continued the war in Indochina without American aid, but that the United States failed to use its considerable leverage on the French to force them to take more positive steps towards granting complete independence to the Associated States. An examination of Franco-American relations between 1950-1954 suggests, however, that American leverage was severely limited and that, given the primacy accorded in U.S. policy to the containment of communism in Southeast Asia, French leverage on the United States was the stronger of the two.

### 1. American Leverage on France

#### a. NATO and Marshall Plan

In the first postwar decade, France was relatively weak and depended upon the United States through NATO and the Marshall Plan for its military security and economic revival. But neither NATO nor the Marshall Plan offered usable fulcrums for influencing French policy on Indochina. Both were judged by the U.S. Government and public to be strongly in the American national interest at a time when the Soviet threat to Western Europe, either through overt aggression or internal subversion, was clearly recognizable. A communist take-over in France was a real possibility. (The French Communist Party was the largest political party in the nation, and, at the time, quite militant in character.) Thus, an American threat to withdraw military and economic support to metropolitan France if it did not alter its policies in Indochina was not plausible. To threaten France with sanctions in NATO or through the Marshall Plan would have jeopardized a U.S. interest in Europe more important than any in Indochina.

#### b. Military Assistance Program

The chief remaining source of influence was the military assistance program to the French in Indochina. Announced by President Truman on May 8, 1950, in response to an urgent French request of February 16, 1950, for military and economic assistance, the purpose of the aid was to help the French in the prosecution of the war against the Viet Minh. The American Ambassador in Paris was called to the Quay d'Orsay, following a determination by the French Government that "it should set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina from French point of view as a result of recent developments and the expectation that at least increased military aid will be furnished to Ho Chi Minh from Communist China." He was told:

"...that the effort in Indochina was such a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise...it was very likely that France might be forced



to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina...looking into the future it was obvious...that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about...." 1/

Although the decision to extend aid to the French military effort in Indochina was taken before the outbreak of the Korean War, it clearly was heavily influenced by the fall of Nationalist China and the arrival of Communist Chinese troops on the Indochina border in December, 1949. The Ho Chi Minh regime was recognized as the legal government of Vietnam by the Chinese Communists on January 18, 1950, and twelve days later the Soviet Government similarly announced its recognition. The NSC was thereupon asked "to undertake a determination of all practicable United States measures to protect its security in Indochina and to prevent the expansion of communist aggression in that area." In NSC 64 (February 27, 1950) it concluded that:

"It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard." 2/

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring on April 5, 1950, to intelligence estimates indicating that the situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated, noted that "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." 3/ Therefore, the rationale for the decision to aid the French was to avert Indochina's sliding into the communist camp, rather than aid for France as a colonial power or a fellow NATO ally.

U.S. assistance, which began modestly with \$10 million in 1950, reached \$1,063 million in fiscal year 1954, at which time it accounted for 78% of the cost of the French war burden. The major portion of the increase came in the last year of the war, following the presentation in 1953 of the Navarre Plan, which called for the enlargement of Franco-Vietnamese forces and a dynamic strategy to recapture the initiative and pave the way for victory by 1955. The optimistic endorsement of the Navarre Plan by Lt. General John W. O'Daniel, head of the MAAG in Indochina, as being capable of turning the tide and leading to a decisive victory over the Viet Minh contributed to Washington's agreement to substantially raise the level of assistance. But equally important, the Navarre Plan, by being a concrete proposal which

held out the promise of ending the long war, put France in a position to pressure the United States for more funds to underwrite the training and equipping of nine additional French battalions and a number of new Vietnamese units.

c. U.S. Supports Independence for Associated States

Throughout the period of assistance to the French military effort, American policy makers kept in mind the necessity of encouraging the French to grant the Associated States full independence and to take practical measures in this direction, such as the training of Vietnamese officers and civil servants. Such active persuasion was delicate and difficult because of the high sensitivity of the French to any "interference" in their "internal" affairs.

A reading of the NSC memorandum and the France-American diplomatic dialogue of the time indicates that Washington kept its eyes on the ultimate goal of the de-colonialization of Indochina. Indeed, it was uncomfortable in finding itself -- forced by the greater necessity of resisting Viet Minh communism -- in the same bed as the French. American pressure may well have helped account for the public declaration of Premier Joseph Laniel of July 3, 1953, that the independence and sovereignty of the Associated States would be "perfected" by transferring to them various functions which had remained under French control, even though no final date was set for complete independence. 4/ At an NSC meeting on August 6, 1953 President Eisenhower stated that assistance to the French would be determined by three conditions:

- (1) A public French commitment to "a program which will insure the support and cooperation of the native Indochina";
- (2) A French invitation for "close [U.S.] military advice";
- (3) Renewed assurances on the passage of the EDC. 5/

Consistent with these, Washington's decision of September 9, 1953, to grant \$385 million towards implementation of the Navarre Plan was made dependent upon a number of conditions. The American Ambassador was instructed to inform Prime Minister Laniel and Foreign Minister Bidault that the United States Government would expect France to:

"....continue pursue policy of perfecting independence of Associated States in conformity with July 3 declaration;

"facilitate exchange information with American military authorities and take into account their views in developing and carrying out French military plans Indochina;

"assure that no basic or permanent alteration of plans and programs for NATO forces will be made as result of additional effort Indochina;...." 6/



#### d. Limitation on American Leverage

The United States attempted to use its military assistance program to gain leverage over French policies, but was severely constrained in what it could do. The U.S. military mission (MAAG) in Saigon was small and limited by the French in its functions to a supply-support group. Allocation of all U.S. aid to the Associated States had to be made, by agreement, solely through the French. Thus, MAAG was not allowed to control the dispensing of supplies once they arrived in Vietnam. MAAG officers were not given the necessary freedom to develop intelligence information on the course of the war; information supplied by the French was limited, and often unreliable or deliberately misleading. The French resisted repeated U.S. admonitions that the native armies of the Associated States be built up and consequently they did not create a true national Vietnamese army. With some minor exceptions, the French excluded American advisors from participating in the training for the use of the materials being furnished by the U.S.

General Navarre viewed any function of MAAG in Saigon beyond bookkeeping to be an intrusion upon internal French affairs. Even though it would have been difficult beyond 1952 to continue the war without American aid, the French never permitted participation by U.S. officials in strategic planning or policy making. 7/ Moreover, the French suspected the economic aid mission of being over-sympathetic to Vietnamese nationalism. The director of the economic aid program, Robert Blum, and the DCM of the American Embassy, Edmund Guillion, were subjected to French criticisms of their pro-Vietnamese views, although the American Ambassador, Donald Heath, remained staunchly pro-French. Thus, French officials insisted that American assistance be furnished with "no strings attached" and with virtually no control over its use. Underlying this attitude was a deep-seated suspicion that the United States desired to totally supplant the French, economically as well as politically, in Indochina. 8/

#### 2. French Leverage on the United States

French leverage over the United States was made possible by the conviction, apparently firmly held in Washington, that the maintenance of a non-Communist Indochina was vital to Western -- and specifically American -- interests.

##### a. Primarily it was France's War

The most fundamental fact was that the French were carrying on a war which the United States considered, rightly or wrongly, to be essential. Thus, the French were always able to threaten simply to end the war by pulling out of Indochina. By the early 1950's, with the French nation tired of the "la sale guerre," this would not have been an unpopular decision within France. Paris was thereby able to hint --

which it did -- that if U.S. assistance was not forthcoming, it would simply withdraw from Indochina, leaving to the United States alone the task of the containment of communism in Southeast Asia. When the Laniel Government requested in the fall of 1953 a massive increase in American assistance, the State Department representative at an NSC meeting asserted that "if this French Government, which proposes reinforcing Indochina with our aid, is not supported by us at this time, it may be the last such government prepared to make a real effort to win in Indochina." 9/ In effect, then, because of the overriding importance given by Washington to holding the communist line in Indochina, the French in being able to threaten to withdraw possessed an important instrument of blackmail.

The upshot of this was that U.S. leverage was quite minimal. Since the French were, in a way, fighting a U.S. battle as well as their own to prevent communist control of Indochina, any ham-fisted U.S. pressure was bound to weaken the French resolve and capability. Consequently, the leverage which the U.S. attained through its aid could be used for little more than to urge greater efficiency and determination on France. In other words, Washington could move Paris to formulate a Navarre type plan, but could not influence the way France conducted the war, nor could it move France on political issues in dispute.

b. Expectation of French Success

The temptation to "go along" with the French until the Viet Minh was defeated was all the more attractive because of the expectation of victory which pervaded official Washington. Before Dien Bien Phu, General O'Daniel consistently reported that victory was within reach if the United States continued its support. In November, 1953, General O'Daniel submitted a progress report on the Navarre Plan which summarized what the French had been doing and what remained to be accomplished. The report said that French Union forces held the initiative and would begin offensives in mid-January, 1954 in the Mekong Delta and in the region between Cape Varella and Da Nang. Meanwhile, a relatively small force would attempt to keep the Viet Minh off balance in the Tonkin Delta until October, 1954, when the French would begin a major offensive North of the 19th parallel. The report concluded by assessing that the Navarre Plan was basically sound and should be supported since it would bring a decisive victory. 10/

O'Daniel's optimism was not duplicated by other observers. CINCPAC, for one, considered the report over-optimistic, stating that political and psychological factors were of such crucial importance that no victory would be possible until the Vietnamese were able to capture villages and until psychological warfare operations could be undertaken to win over the people. 11/ The Army attaché in Saigon was even less sanguine. He flatly stated that the French, after six months of the Navarre Plan, were still on the defensive and showed no sign of being able to win the war in the future. The attaché's views were, moreover,



concurred in by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, who observed that other high U.S. military officers in Indochina agreed with the attaché and found O'Daniel's report unwarrantedly optimistic. 12/

c. American Policy in Europe: The EDC

An important source of French leverage was to be found outside of Far Eastern affairs. A primary objective of American foreign policy in 1953-1954 was the creation of a European Defense Community (E.D.C.). The purpose of the EDC was to "envelopé" a new West German Army into an integrated six nation army which would go a long way towards providing for the defense of Western Europe. Washington officials expected that the EDC would permit a reduction (but not complete elimination) of American ground forces in Europe. The membership of France in the EDC -- as a counter-weight to the proposed re-arming of Germany -- was essential to its adoption by the five other European nations. Because of the high priority given to EDC in American planning, there was a strong reluctance to antagonize the French in Indochina. This was reinforced by knowledge that the French placed a far lower priority on EDC, in part because of the traditional French fear of an armed Germany, in part because the French estimate of Soviet intentions in Western Europe differed from that of the United States in that it placed a low probability on a direct Soviet intervention. 13/

Apparently unnoticed at the time was an implicit contradiction in the American policy of pushing the French simultaneously on both adopting the EDC and on making a greater effort in Indochina. The latter required increased French forces in the Far East. But the French National Assembly would not adopt the EDC unless, at a minimum, it was assured that French forces in Europe would be on parity with those of Germany. Thus, the French argued that the possible coming into effect of the EDC prevented them from putting larger forces into Indochina. After the loss of North Vietnam and the French rejection of EDC, the Chairman of an Interdepartmental Working Group set up to formulate a new American policy on Indochina for the post-Geneva period observed that "our policies thus far have failed because we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both." 14/

d. French Desire for Negotiations

French leverage was also demonstrated by their ability to have the Indochina problem placed on the agenda for the Geneva Conference at the time of the Quadripartite Foreign Minister's meeting in February 1954 in Berlin. The Geneva Conference had been called to work out a political settlement for the Korean War. Dulles did not wish to negotiate on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation of the French and they could negotiate from a position of far greater strength. But the Laniel Government was under mounting pressure from French public opinion to end the Indochinese war. At Berlin the French delegation insisted, despite American objections, that Indochina be

inscribed on the Geneva agenda. Foreign Minister Bidault reportedly warned that if the United States did not acquiesce on this point, EDC would doubtlessly be scuttled.

Dulles did succeed in opposing Soviet efforts to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power at Geneva and forced the acceptance in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition would be implied in the Chinese invitation to the conference. In return for this concession, however, the French were able to give highly visible evidence of their interest in ending the war soon through negotiations. Ironically, this had a double-edged effect: in Paris the "peace faction" was mollified; but in Hanoi plans were made to step up the intensity of the war so as to make a show of strength prior to the beginning of the Geneva Conference. Thus, the coming battle of Dien Bien Phu came to have a crucial significance in large measure because of the very inclusion of the Indochina item for the Geneva Conference. As Ellen Hammer has written:

"This was the last opportunity before the Geneva Conference for the Viet Minh to show its military strength, its determination to fight until victory. And there were those who thought that General Giap was resolved on victory, no matter the cost, not only to impress the enemy but also to convince his Communist allies that the Viet Minh by its own efforts had earned a seat at the conference table and the right to a voice in its own future. For the French....upon the outcome of the battle depended much of the spirit in which they would send their representatives to Geneva." 15/

e. Conclusion: Incompatibility of American and French Objectives

In summary, one must take notice of the paradox of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the French with respect to Indochina, 1950-1954. American interests and objectives were basically different from those of the French. The United States was concerned with the containment of communism and restricting the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. The immediate U.S. objective was supporting a domino. France, on the other hand, was fighting primarily a colonial war designed to maintain the French presence in Southeast Asia and avoid the crumbling of the French Union. Despite occasional pledges to the "perfectionment" of independence for the Associated States -- pledges which were usually given under circumstances which were forcing France to "justify" the war, in part to receive further American assistance -- France was not fighting a long and costly war in order to thereafter completely pull out.

The fact that the American and French means -- pushing for military victory -- converged in 1950-1954 obscured the fact that the ends of the two nations were inherently incompatible. This further led



to a basic incompatibility in the two strands of American policy:

(1) Washington wanted France to fight the war and win, preferably with American guidance and advice; and (2) having achieved success at great cost in what the French viewed at least initially as more a "colonial" than "anti-communist" war, Washington expected the French to withdraw magnanimously. (A Frenchman might have asked how France, even if it wished to, could have left Indochina without creating similar pressures for withdrawal from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, where over one million Frenchmen lived.) In this inherent inconsistency can be found much of the explanation for the lack of American leverage over France during the pre-Geneva years.

1. Paris Embtel 837 to SecState February 22, 1950 (SECRET).
2. The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, NSC 64, February 27, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
3. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, April 5, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
4. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), pp. 301-302.
5. Summary and Comments, NSC 161st Meeting, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
6. Deptel 868, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
7. An experienced French journalist in Indochina wrote: "To be sure, American officers also tried to supervise strategy; but after a few fruitless brushes with a high command that was ferociously attached to its prerogatives they decided to leave it entirely to the French. In the end all the experts of the Military Aid Advisory Group kept in the background, resigning themselves to letting this Indochinese war be fought in the French way."
- Lucien Bodard, The Quicksand War: Prelude to Vietnam. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), pp. 224-225.
8. Henri Navarre, Agonie de l'Indochine, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), pp. 27-28; 137-138; Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Volume II (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 811, 1079; Robert McClintock, The Meaning of Limited War (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1967), p. 174.
9. Summary and Comments, NSC 161st Meeting, September 9, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
10. U.S. Joint Military Mission to Indochina, Progress Report on Military Situation in Indochina as of 19 November 1953, 19 November 1953 (SECRET).
11. Undated appendix to Summary of Progress Report of [O'Daniel] Joint Military Mission to Indochina (SECRET).
12. Dept of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 (Intelligence), November 24, 1953 (TOP SECRET).
13. Raymond Aron, "Historical Sketch of the Great Debate," in Daniel Lerner and Raymond Aron, eds., France Defeats EDC (New York: Praeger, 1957).
14. McClintock, The Meaning of Limited War, p. 175.
15. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, p. 328.



II. A. 3.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO  
SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

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## II. A. 3. PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO BASIC U.S. INTERESTS

Three major perceptions dominated U.S. thinking and policy-making on Indochina during the years 1950-1954. The first was the growing importance of Asia in world politics. The process of devolution from colonial empires to independent states, it was thought, would create power vacuums and conditions of instability which would make Asia susceptible to becoming a battleground in the growing East-West cold war conflict. Second, there was an undeniable tendency to view the worldwide "communist threat" in monolithic terms. This was perhaps understandable given the relatively extensive influence then exerted by the Soviet Union over other communist nations, and the communist parties in non-communist states. Moreover, the West, and especially the U.S., was challenged by the expansionist policies openly proclaimed by leaders of virtually all the communist movements. Third, the attempt of the patently Communist Ho Chi Minh regime to evict the French from Indochina was seen as part of the Southeast Asian manifestation of the communist world-wide aggressive intent. The resistance of France to Ho, therefore, was seen as a crucial stand on the line along which the West would contain communism.

### 1. "Domino Principle" Before Korea

These three perceptions help explain the widely held assumption in official Washington that if Indochina was "lost" to communism, the remaining nations of Southeast Asia would inexorably succumb to communist infiltration and be taken over in a chain reaction. This strategic conception of the communist threat to Southeast Asia pre-dated the outbreak in June 1950 of the Korean War. It probably had its period of gestation at the time of the Nationalist withdrawal from mainland China. NSC 48/1 was the key document in framing this conception. Drawn up in June 1949, after Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had expressed concern at the course of events in Asia and had suggested a widening of the previous country-by-country memorandum approach to a regional plan, NSC 48/1 included the statements that "the extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us...If Southeast Asia is also swept by communism, we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia." 1/

It was Russia rather than China that was seen in 1949 as being the principal source of the communist threat in Asia. Although it was conceded that in the course of time China (or Japan or India) may attempt to dominate Asia, --

"now and for the foreseeable future it is the USSR which threatens to dominate Asia through the complementary instruments of communist conspiracy and diplomatic pressure



supported by military strength. For the foreseeable future, therefore, our immediate objective must be to contain and where feasible to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area and that the Soviet Union would encounter serious obstacles should it attempt to threaten the peace, national independence or stability of the Asiatic nations."

NSC 48/1 also recognized that "the colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist movements, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target for a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin."

At this time, the NSC believed that the United States, as a Western power in any area where the bulk of the population had long been suspicious of Western influence, should insofar as possible refrain from taking any lead in Southeast Asia. The United States should instead "encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area," recognizing "that the non-communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against communist expansion in Asia." NSC 48/2 pointed out that particular attention should be given to the problem of Indochina where "action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese."

## 2. Importance of Indochina

Indochina was of special importance because it was the only area adjacent to China which contained a large European army which was in armed conflict with "communist" forces. The Chinese Communists were believed to be furnishing the Viet Minh with substantial material assistance. Official French sources reported that there were some Chinese troops in Tonkin, as well as large numbers ready for action against the French on the Chinese side of the border. The first NSC memorandum dealing solely with Indochina (NSC 64) was adopted as policy on March 27, 1950. This paper took note of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh and estimated that it was doubtful that the French Expeditionary forces, combined with Indochinese troops, could successfully contain Ho Chi Minh's forces should they be strengthened by either Chinese troops crossing the border, or by communist-supplied arms and material in quantity.

NSC 64 -- written, it should be noted, by the Truman Administration and before the outbreak of the Korean War -- observed that "the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia." It concluded with a statement of what came to be known as the "domino principle":

"It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard." 2/

### 3. Impact of Start of Korean War

The outbreak of the Korean War, and the American decision to resist North Korean aggression, sharpened overnight our thoughts and actions with respect to Southeast Asia. The American military response symbolized in the most concrete manner possible the basic belief that holding the line in Southeast Asia was essential to American security interests. The French struggle in Indochina came far more than before to be seen as an integral part of the containment of communism in that region of the world. Accordingly, the United States intensified and enlarged its programs of aid in Indochina. Military aid shipments to Indochina acquired in 1951 the second highest priority, just behind the Korea war program. 3/

A consequence of the Korean War, and particularly the Chinese intervention, was that China replaced the Soviet Union as the principal source of the perceived communist threat in Southeast Asia. This was made explicit in NSC 124/2 (June 1952) which stated that "the danger of an overt military attack against Southeast Asia is inherent in the existence of a hostile and aggressive Communist China."

The "domino principle" in its purest form was written into the "General Considerations" section of NSC 124/2. It linked the loss of any single state of Southeast Asia to the stability of Europe and the security of the United States:

"2. Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests.

"a. The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist control as a consequence of overt or covert Chinese Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism by the remaining countries of this group. Furthermore, an alignment with communism of



the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exceptions of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow. Such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.

"b. Communist control of all of Southeast Asia would render the U.S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain precarious and would seriously jeopardize fundamental U.S. security interests in the Far East.

"c. Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, is the principal world source of natural rubber and tin, and a producer of petroleum and other strategically important commodities. The rice exports of Burma and Thailand are critically important to Malaya, Ceylon and Hong Kong and are of considerable significance to Japan and India, all important areas of free Asia.

"d. The loss of Southeast Asia, especially of Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to communism." 4/

The possibility of a large-scale Chinese intervention in Indochina, similar to the Chinese intervention in Korea, came to dominate the thinking of American policy-makers after the start of the Korean War. Such an intervention would not have been surprising given the larger numbers of Chinese troops massed along the Tonkin border and the materiel assistance being given to the Viet Minh. The NIE of December 1950 considered direct Chinese intervention to be "impending." 5/ The following year it was estimated that after an armistice in Korea the Chinese would be capable of intervention in considerable strength, but would be inhibited from acting overtly by a number of factors, including the risk of American retaliation and the disadvantages attendant upon involvement in another protracted campaign. 6/ By early 1952, as the French position showed signs of deterioration, intelligence authorities believed that the Chinese would be content to continue aiding the Viet Minh without undertaking direct involvement (except for material aid) unless provoked into it. 7/ Thus, the intelligence community, after estimating a high risk of Chinese intervention at the start of the Korean War, gradually reduced its estimate of Indochina being broadened into a wider war as the Viet Minh showed signs of doing well enough on their own.

Nevertheless, the NSC undertook in 1952 to list a course of action for the "resolute defense" of Indochina in case of a large-scale Chinese intervention. It included the provision of air and naval forces; the interdiction of Chinese communication lines, including those in China proper; and a naval blockade of the China coast. If these "minimum courses of action" did not prove to be sufficient, the U.S. should take air and

naval action "against all suitable military targets in China," when possible in conjunction with British and French forces. 8/

In prescribing these recommended actions, the NSC focused on the less likely contingency of a Chinese intervention rather than the more likely contingency of the continued deterioration of the French position in Indochina itself. It did so despite the fact that NSC 124/2 conceded that the "primary threat" was the situation in Indochina itself (increasing subversive efforts by indigenous communist forces, increased guerrilla activity, and increased Viet Minh civil control over population and territory). Apparently, the NSC wanted to make clear that direct U.S. involvement in Indochina was to be limited to dealing with direct Chinese involvement. In the absence of this contingency, however, and to meet the existing situation in Indochina, the NSC recommended that the United States increase its level of aid to French Union forces but "without relieving the French authorities of their basic military responsibility for the defense of the Associated States." 9/

#### 4. Republican Administration and Far East

Two events in 1953 served to deepen the American commitment in Indochina. The first was the arrival of a Republican Administration following a long period in which the G.O.P. had persistently accused the Truman Administration of being responsible for the "loss" of China to communism. The writings and speeches of John Foster Dulles before the election left no doubt that he regarded Southeast Asia as a key region in the conflict with communist "imperialism," and that it was important to draw the line of containment north of the Rice Bowl of Asia -- the Indochina peninsula. 10/ In his first State of the Union Message on February 3, 1953, President Eisenhower promised a "new, positive foreign policy." He went on to link the communist aggression in Korea and Malaya with Indochina. Dulles subsequently spoke of Korea and Indochina as two flanks, with the principal enemy -- Red China -- in the center. A special study mission headed by Representative Walter Judd, a recognized Republican spokesman on Asia, surveyed the Far East and reported on its view of the high stakes involved:

"The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, Malaya, Singapore and even Indonesia would become more vulnerable to the Communist power drive....Communism would then be in an exceptional position to complete its perversion of the political and social revolution that is spreading through Asia....The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina." 11/

The Republican Administration clearly intended to prevent the loss of Indochina by taking a more forthright, anti-communist stand.



## 5. Impact of Korean Armistice

Second, the armistice in Korea created apprehension that the Chinese Communists would now turn their attention to Indochina. President Eisenhower warned in a speech on April 16, 1953, that any armistice in Korea that merely released armed forces to pursue an attack elsewhere would be a fraud. Secretary Dulles continued this theme after the Korean armistice in a speech on September 2, 1953, on the war in Indochina. After noting that "a single Communist aggressive front extends from Korea on the north to Indochina in the south" he said:

"Communist China has been and now is training, equipping and supplying the Communist forces in Indochina. There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own Army into Indochina. The Chinese Communist regime should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina. I say this soberly...in the hope of preventing another aggressor miscalculation." 12/

Underlying these warnings to China was the belief that the difference between success or failure in avoiding a takeover of all Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh probably depended upon the extent of Chinese assistance or direct participation. Signaling a warning to China was probably designed to deter further Chinese involvement. Implicit in the signals was the threat that if China came into the war, the United States would be forced to follow suit, preferably with allies but, if necessary, alone. Furthermore, the Eisenhower Administration implied that in keeping with its policy of massive retaliation the United States would administer a punishing nuclear blow to China without necessarily involving its land forces in an Asian war.

## 6. Deepening of U.S. Commitment to Containment

In addition to the new mood in Washington created by the strategic perceptions of a new Administration and the Korean armistice, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and the deepening war weariness in France served to strengthen those who favored a more assertive policy in Indochina. The United States rushed supplies to Laos and Thailand in May 1953 and provided six C-119's with civilian crews for the airlift into Laos. 13/ It increased substantially the volume and tempo of American military assistance to French Union forces. For fiscal year 1954, \$460 million in military assistance was planned. Congress only appropriated \$400 million, but following the presentation by the French of the Navarre Plan an additional \$385 million was decided upon by the NSC. 14/ No objection was raised when France asked our views in August, 1953, on the transfer of its battalion in Korea to Indochina and subsequently took this action. 15/ The Navarre Plan, by offering a format for victory which promised success without the direct involvement of American military forces, tended, because of its very attractiveness, to have the effect of enlarging our commitment to assist the French towards achieving a military solution.

In the last NSC paper approved before the Indochina situation was totally transformed by the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference, the "successful defense of Tonkin" was said to be the "keystone of the defense of mainland Southeast Asia except possibly Malaya." 16/ NSC 5405 took some, but probably not sufficient, account of the deterioration in the French position which had occurred since NSC 124/2 was approved eighteen months earlier. It, nevertheless, repeated the domino principle in detail, including the admonition that "such is the interrelation of the countries of the area that effective counteraction would be immediately necessary to prevent the loss of any single country from leading to submission to, or an alignment with, communism by the remaining countries of Southeast Asia and Indonesia." The document also noted that:

"In the conflict in Indochina, the Communists and non-Communists worlds clearly confront one another in the field of battle. The loss of the struggle in Indochina, in addition to its impact in Southeast Asia and South Asia, would therefore have the most serious repercussions on U.S. and free world interests in Europe and elsewhere."

The subject of possible negotiations was broached in NSC 5405, following the observation that political pressures in France may impel the French Government to seek a negotiated rather than a military settlement. It was noted (before Dien Bien Phu) that if the Navarre Plan failed or appeared doomed to failure, the French might seek to negotiate simply for the best possible terms, irrespective of whether these offered any assurance of preserving a non-communist Indochina.

In this regard the NSC decided the U.S. should employ every feasible means to influence the French Government against concluding the struggle on terms "inconsistent" with the basic U.S. objectives. The French should be told that: (1) in the absence of a marked improvement in the military situation, there was no basis for negotiation on acceptable terms; (2) the U.S. would "flatly oppose any idea" of a cease-fire as a preliminary to negotiations, because such a cease-fire would result in an irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position in Indochina; (3) a nominally non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh with no opportunity for the replacement of the French by the United States or the United Kingdom. /Emphasis Added/

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, two comments can be made:

a. With the growing perception of a Chinese threat to Indochina, and, therefore, to all of Southeast Asia, the U.S. Government tended to concentrate on the military rather than the political aspects of the French-Viet Minh struggle. In consequence, American attention focused on (1) deterring external intervention from China, and (2) assisting the French



in successfully prosecuting the war through the implementation of the Navarre Plan. The result of this was that the encouragement and support of the non-communist nationalist governments in the Associated States was almost inadvertently given lower priority. The United States was reluctant to press the French too strongly on taking measures to foster Vietnam nationalism because of its overriding interest in halting the potential sweep of communism through Southeast Asia. Moreover, it was easier to develop a policy for dealing with the external threat of intervention than to meet the internal threat of subversion, or the even more difficult process of finding and sustaining a genuine nationalist alternative to the Viet Minh.

b. The "domino theory" and the assumptions behind it were never questioned. The homogeneity of the nations of Southeast Asia was taken as a given, as was the linkage in their ability to remain democratic, or at an acceptable minimum, non-communist, nations. Undoubtedly, in the first decade of the cold war there existed an unfortunate stereotype of a monolithic communist expansionary bloc. It was reinforced by a somewhat emotional approach on the part of many Americans to communism in China and Asia. This "syndrome" was, in part, the result of the "fall" of China, which some felt could have been averted, and a few hoped would still be reversed.

Accordingly, not sufficient cognizance was taken of the individuality of the states of Southeast Asia and the separateness of their societies. Probably there was some lack of knowledge in depth on the part of Washington policy-makers about the area. No one before World War II had expected that the United States would be called upon to take a position of leadership in these remote colonial territories of our European allies. In hindsight, these shortcomings may have led to the fallacious belief that a neutralist or communist Indochina would inevitably draw the other states of Asia into the communist bloc or into neutralism. But the "fallacy" was neither evident then, nor is it demonstrable now in retrospect.

1. NSC 48/1, "A Report on...The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," December 23, 1949 (TOP SECRET).
2. NSC 64, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina," February 27, 1950 (TOP SECRET).
3. Historical Office, Dept. of State, Research Project No. 370, "United States Policy on Indochina, 1945-1954," p.6.
4. NSC 124/2, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," June 25, 1952 (TOP SECRET).
5. NIE-5, "Indochina: Current Situation and Probable Developments," December 29, 1950 (SECRET).
6. NIE-35, "Probable Developments in Indochina during the Remainder of 1951," August 7, 1951 (SECRET).
7. NIE-35/1, "Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1952," March 3, 1952 (SECRET).
8. NSC 124/2.
9. Ibid.
10. John Foster Dulles, War or Peace (New York, 1950), p. 231; Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 25-26.
11. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report of the Special Study Mission to Pakistan, India, Thailand and Indochina, pursuant to H. Res. 113, H. Rpt. No. 412, 83d Cong., 1st Sess., May 6, 1953, p. 53, as quoted in Gurtov, op.cit., p. 26.
12. Speech before the American Legion, St. Louis, Missouri, September 2, 1953.
13. Memorandum to Secretary of State from Asst Secy for Far East, Mr. Walter E. Robertson, April 28, 1953 (SECRET); An Embassy Paris telegram to Dept. State, No. 5766, May 3, 1953 (SECRET).
14. Historical Office, State Dept., Research Project No. 354, Summary, pp. 8-9.
15. Memorandum of Conversation, Acting Secretary Walter Bedell Smith and Minister Doridou, French Embassy, August 8, 1953 (SECRET).
16. NSC 5405, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Southeast Asia," January 16, 1954 (TOP SECRET).



SUMMARY

Among the more frequently cited misapprehensions concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam is the view that the Eisenhower Administration flatly rejected intervention in the First Indochina War. The record shows plainly that the U.S. did seriously consider intervention, and advocated it to the U.K. and other allies. With the intensification of the French-Viet Minh war and the deterioration of the French military position, the United States was forced to take a position on: first, a possible U.S. military intervention in order to avert a Viet Minh victory; second, the increasingly likely contingency of negotiations between Paris and Ho Chi Minh to end the war through a political settlement. In order to avoid a French sell-out, and as an alternative to unilateral U.S. intervention, the U.S. proposed in 1954 to broaden the war by involving a number of allies in a collective defense effort through "united action."

The U.S. Government internal debate on the question of intervention centered essentially on the desirability and feasibility of U.S. military action. Indochina's importance to U.S. security interests in the Far East was taken for granted. The Eisenhower Administration followed in general terms the rationale for American interest in Indochina that was expressed by the Truman Administration. With respect to intervention, the Truman Administration's NSC 124 of February 1952 recognized that the U.S. might be forced to take some military action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In late 1953 - early 1954, as the fall of Indochina seemed imminent, the question of intervention came to the fore. The Defense Department pressed for a determination by highest authority of the size and nature of the forces the U.S. was willing to commit in Indochina. Some in DOD questioned the then operating assumption that U.S. air and naval forces would suffice as aid for the French. The Army was particularly concerned about contingency planning that assumed that U.S. air and naval action alone could bring military victory, and argued for realistic estimates of requisite land forces, including the degree of mobilization that would be necessary. The State Department thought that Indochina was so critical from a foreign policy viewpoint that intervention might be necessary. But DOD and the JCS, estimating that air-naval action alone could not stem the surging Viet Minh, recommended that rather than intervening directly, the U.S. should concentrate on urging Paris to train an expanded indigenous army, and should exert all possible pressures -- in Europe as well as in Asia -- to motivate the French to fight hard for a military victory. Many in the U.S. Government (the Ridgway Report stands out in this group) were wary that U.S. intervention might provoke Chinese Communist intervention. In the latter case, even a considerable U.S. deployment of ground forces would not be able to stem the tide in Indochina. A number of special high-level studies were unable to bridge the evident disparity between those who



held that vital U.S. interests were at stake in Indochina, and those who were unwilling to make a firm decision to intervene with U.S. ground forces to assure those interests. Consequently, when the French began pressing for U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu, the Eisenhower Administration took the position that the U.S. would not intervene unilaterally, but only in concert with a number of European and Far Eastern allies as part of a combined force. (Tab 1)

This "united action" proposal, announced publicly by Secretary Dulles on March 29, 1954, was also designed to offer the French an alternative to surrender at the negotiating table. Negotiations for a political settlement of the Franco-Viet Minh war, however, were assured when the Big Four Foreign Ministers meeting in February at Berlin placed Indochina on the agenda of the impending Geneva Conference. Foreign Minister Bidault insisted upon this, over U.S. objections, because of the mounting pressure in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The "peace faction" in Paris became stronger in proportion to the "peace feelers" let out by Ho Chi Minh, and the lack of French success on the battlefield. U.S. policy was to steer the French away from negotiations because of the fear that Indochina would thereby be handed over to the communist "empire."

Secretary Dulles envisaged a ten-nation collective defense force to take "united action" to prevent a French defeat -- if necessary before the Geneva Conference. Dulles and Admiral Radford were, at first, inclined towards an early unilateral intervention at Dien Bien Phu, as requested by the French (the so-called "Operation Vulture"). But Congressional leaders indicated they would not support U.S. military action without active allied participation, and President Eisenhower decided that he would not intervene without Congressional approval. In addition to allied participation, Congressional approval was deemed dependent upon a public declaration by France that it was speeding up the timetable for independence for the Associated States.

The U.S. was unable to gather much support for "united action" except in Thailand and the Philippines. The British response was one of hesitation in general, and flat opposition to undertaking military action before the Geneva Conference. Eden feared that it would lead to an expansion of the war with a high risk of Chinese intervention. Moreover, the British questioned both the U.S. domino principle, and the belief that Indochina would be totally lost at Dien Bien Phu and through negotiations at Geneva. As for the French, they were less interested in "united action" than in immediate U.S. military assistance at Dien Bien Phu. Paris feared that united action would lead to the internationalization of the war, and take control out of its hands. In addition, it would impede or delay the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. But repeated French requests for direct U.S. intervention during the final agony of Dien Bien Phu failed to alter President Eisenhower's conviction that it would be an error for the U.S. to act alone.



Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu during the Geneva Conference, the "domino theory" underwent a reappraisal. On a May 11 press conference, Secretary Dulles observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without, perhaps, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." In a further remark that was deleted from the official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager populations. (Tab 2)

#### DISCUSSION

II. B. Tab 1 - The Interagency Debate over U.S. Intervention in Indochina

Tab 2 - The Attempt to Organize "United Action"

THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE  
OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

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## II. B. 1. THE INTERAGENCY DEBATE OVER U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA

### 1. The General Policy Context

The debate over the wisdom and manner of American intervention in Indochina was based primarily on the desirability of military involvement, not on questions concerning Indochina's value to United States security interests in the Far East. The Eisenhower Administration was in general agreement with the rationale for American interest in Indochina expressed by the Truman Administration. The United States Government first came to full grips with the question of intervention in late 1953 -- early 1954 as the fall of Indochina seemed to become imminent.

#### a. The Final Truman Program (NSC 124)

NSC 124 (February, 1952) considered imperative the prevention of a Communist take-over in Indochina. It recognized that even in the absence of "identifiable aggression" by Communist China, the U.S. might be forced to take some action in order to prevent the subversion of Southeast Asia. In case of overt Chinese intervention, NSC 124 recommended: (1) naval, air and logistical support of French Union forces; (2) naval blockade of Communist China; (3) attacks by land and carrier-based aircraft on military targets in Mainland China. It stopped short of recommending the commitment of U.S. ground forces in Indochina. 1/

#### b. Eisenhower Administration's "Basic National Security Policy"

NSC 162/2, adopted in October, 1953, ten months after the Republican Administration took office, was the basic document of the "New Look." After commenting on U.S. and Soviet defense capabilities, the prospect of nuclear parity and the need to balance domestic economic policy with military expenditures, it urged a military posture based on the ability "to inflict massive retaliatory damage" on the enemy. Indochina was listed as an area of "strategic importance" to the U.S. An attack on such important areas "probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressor." The use of tactical nuclear weapons in conventional war situations was recommended, but they were not specifically suggested for use in Indochina. 2/

### 2. The Question of Intervention with Ground Forces

#### a. The Problem is Presented

In late 1953, the Army questioned prevalent assumptions that ground forces would not be required in Indochina if the area was as important to U.S. security interests as the NSC papers stated. The Army urged that the issue be faced squarely in order to provide the best possible preparation for whatever courses of action might be undertaken. The Plans Division of the Army General Staff pointed out that under current

programs the Army did not have the capability of providing divisional forces for operations in Indochina while maintaining its existing commitments in Europe and the Far East. Army also suggested a "reevaluation of the importance of Indochina and Southeast Asia in relation to the possible cost of saving it." 3/

With the deterioration of the French military situation in Indochina, the first serious attention came to be given to the manner and size of a U.S. intervention. The question to be faced was: how far was the U.S. prepared to go in terms of force commitments to ensure that Indochina stayed out of Communist hands? The Defense Department, though not of a single mind on this question, pressed for an early determination of the forces the U.S. would be willing to dispatch in an emergency situation. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert Anderson, proposed to Secretary of Defense Wilson on January 6, 1954, that the U.S. decide immediately to employ combat forces in Indochina on the "reasonable assurance of strong indigenous support of our forces," whether or not the French Government approved. 4/ But Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in OSD, wrote:

"... Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement -- such as 'Naval and Air units only.' One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly."

Admiral Davis then went on:

"Comment: If it is determined desirable to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed." 5/

b. NSC: State and Defense Views

The evident disparity between, on the one hand, our high strategic valuation of Indochina, and on the other, our unwillingness to reach a firm decision on the forces required to defend the area became the subject of the NSC's 179th meeting on January 8, 1954. At this meeting the Council discussed NSC 177 on Southeast Asia, 6/ but it decided not to take up the Special Annex to NSC 177 which laid out a series of choices which might face the United States if the French military position in Indochina continued to deteriorate. Nevertheless, the NSC at that time did make some headway on the problem it had posed for itself.



According to summary notes taken of the meeting, 7/ State and Defense were at considerable variance on what should be done in either of two contingencies: first, French abandonment of the struggle; second, a French demand for substantial U.S. forces (ground, sea, and air). The State view considered the French position so critical already as (in the rapporteur's words) to "force the U.S. to decide now to utilize U.S. forces in the fighting in Southeast Asia." The Defense representative refused to underwrite U.S. involvement. He reportedly stated that the French could win by the spring of 1955 given U.S. aid and given "improved French political relations with the Vietnamese... The commitment of U.S. forces in a 'civil war' in Indochina will be an admission of the bankruptcy of our political policies re Southeast Asia and France and should be resorted to only in extremity." He urged that every step be taken to avoid a direct American commitment.

The Council meeting reached two important conclusions, both fully in keeping with the Defense position. First, it decided that a discussion of contingencies for U.S. involvement missed the essential point that the French were capable of winning provided they gained native political and military cooperation. Second, NSC 177 was, as Defense suggested, inadequate in that the study failed to come to grips with the fact that eventual success in Indochina depended upon French ability to solve the problem of how to obtain Vietnamese support for the war effort.

c. The JCS View

The NSC meeting of January 8 still left open the question of U.S. action in the event troops were indisputably necessary to prevent the "loss" of Indochina. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept their options open. The Chiefs thought that the Navarre Plan was fundamentally sound, but was being steadily undercut by the gulf separating the French from the Vietnamese, by General Navarre's failure to implement U.S. recommendations, and by hesitancy in Paris over the necessary political concessions to the Bao Dai government. Yet JCS refused either to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces or to back unequivocally their employment. 8/

d. Formation of Special Working Group on Indochina

Dissatisfaction with NSC 177 and the NSC's subsequent failure in NSC 5405 9/ to resolve the ground force commitment issue led to the formation of a working group to evaluate the French military effort, to make recommendations concerning future U.S. contributions to it, and to devote attention to the various contingencies under which the U.S. might be called upon to intervene directly in the war. The working group, under the chairmanship of General G. B. Erskine (USMC, Ret.), was composed of representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and CIA. The group was responsible to NSC through General W. Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, who had been appointed by the Council to head the Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina.



e. The Erskine Report, Part I: Motivate the French

The first section of Erskine's two-part report, dated February 6, 1954, was based on the assumption that U.S. policy toward Indochina would not require resort to overt combat operations by U.S. forces. Within that framework, the report adhered closely to the Defense Department position that the French, if properly motivated, could win in Indochina, but that their failure to carry through on needed reforms would require U.S. consideration of active involvement. The report noted that:

"There is in Indo-China, or programmed for Indo-China..., a sufficient amount of equipment and supplies and a potential manpower pool sufficient eventually to defeat the Communists decisively if properly utilized and maintained and if the situation continues to permit this manpower to be converted into military effectiveness. Success will ultimately be dependent upon the inspiration of the local population to fight for their own freedom from Communist domination and the willingness of the French both to take the measures to stimulate that inspiration and to more fully utilize the native potential."

The Erskine Report (Part I) recommended: (1) augmentation of the French air force, but not using American personnel; (2) additional U.S. military assistance support of \$124 million (supplementing FY 1954 commitments of \$1.115 billion); (3) elevation of MAAG's status to that of Military Mission, with expanded personnel and advisory authority over training and planning; (4) assignment of additional U.S. personnel with the mission of acting as instructors and performing other key duties within the French forces; (5) Presidential letters to the Heads of State of the Associated States reaffirming our support of their independence and explaining our motivations in assisting them through the French; (6) an effort be undertaken to persuade Bao Dai to take a more active part in the anti-Viet Minh struggle. The report concluded that the program of recommended changes could bring about victory over the Viet Minh if it received full French approval and barring Chinese intervention.

f. The Erskine Report, Part II: Intervention Only After Geneva?

The second part of the Erskine Report did not appear until March 17, 1954, and unlike the first, was the responsibility only of the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs, with the State Department position "reserved." The report confirmed previous determinations that the loss of Indochina would be a major military and political setback for the United States. It recommended that prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, the U.S. should inform Britain and France that it was interested only in military victory in Indochina and would not associate ourselves with any settlement which falls short of that objective. It further recommended that in the event of an unsatisfactory outcome at Geneva, the U.S. should



pursue ways of continuing the struggle in concert with the Associated States, the United Kingdom, and other allies. The National Security Council was therefore requested to determine the extent of American willingness to commit combat forces to the region with or without French cooperation. But with the Dien Bien Phu siege just beginning, and the Geneva Conference six weeks away, the Erskine Report suggested that the United States influence and observe developments at the Geneva Conference before deciding on active involvement.

g. NSC 177 Annex Raises Intervention Question Anew

Following the second part of the Erskine Report, the President evidently decided that the Special Annex to NSC 177, which had been withdrawn in January 1954, should be redistributed for consideration by the Council's Planning Board. 10/ The Annex to NSC 177 posed the fundamental choice between (a) acceptance of the loss of Indochina, which would be followed by U.S. efforts to prevent further deterioration of our security position in Southeast Asia, or (b) direct military action to save Indochina before the French and Vietnamese became committed to an unacceptable political settlement at Geneva.

Among the alternative courses of action outlined in the Annex, two in particular -- both geared to direct U.S. action prior to a Geneva settlement -- were discussed. Under the first, based on French consent to continue fighting, the U.S. was urged to (1) seek a Franco-Vietnamese settlement of the independence issue, (2) insist upon a build-up of indigenous forces with U.S. advisory and material support, (3) demand the maintenance of French forces in the field at their then present level, and (4) prepare to provide sufficient U.S. forces to make possible the success of a joint effort. Full internationalization of the war would be discussed with the French later, thereby discounting immediate action in concert with the British or Asian nations.

The second alternative assumed a French pull-out. In such a case the United States could either accept the loss of Indochina, or adopt an active policy while France gradually withdrew its troops. Should we accept the latter course, our "most positive" step offering "the greatest assurance of success" would be, NSC estimated, to join with indigenous forces in combatting the Viet Minh until they were reduced "to the status of scattered guerrilla bands." U.S. land, sea, and air forces would be involved.

The Annex was based upon assumptions that U.S. involvement against the Viet Minh would not provoke massive Chinese intervention, would not lead to direct Soviet involvement, and that there would be no resumption of hostilities in Korea. It acknowledged that any change in these assumptions would seriously jeopardize the success of the alternatives proposed. In particular, it noted that U.S. participation heightened the risk of Chinese intervention, and Chinese entry would alter radically both the immediate military situation and U.S. force requirements.

h. Army Questions Feasibility of Air-Naval Intervention and Outlines Ground Forces Requirements

The principal result of the discussions on the NSC 177 Special Annex was to bring into the open the issue of the costs in manpower and materiel of a U.S. involvement. The Army was critical of contingency planning that was based on the assumption that U.S. air and naval forces could be used in Indochina without the commitment of ground combat forces. General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, later wrote in his Memoirs that he was quite disturbed at talk in high government circles about employing air-naval power alone in Indochina. An Army position paper submitted to the NSC in the first week of April, 1954, argued as follows:

"1. U.S. intervention with combat forces in Indochina is not militarily desirable...

"2. A victory in Indochina cannot be assured by U.S. intervention with air and naval forces alone.

"3. The use of atomic weapons in Indochina would not reduce the number of ground forces required to achieve a victory in Indochina.

"4. Seven U.S. divisions or their equivalent, with appropriate naval and air support, would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists do not intervene. However, U.S. intervention plans cannot be based on the assumption that the Chinese Communists will not intervene.

"5. The equivalent of 12 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina, if the French withdraw and the Chinese Communists intervene.

"6. The equivalent of 7 U.S. divisions would be required to win a victory in Indochina if the French remain and the Chinese Communists intervene.

"7. Requirements for air and naval support for ground force operations are:

a. Five hundred fighter-bomber sorties per day exclusive of interdiction and counter-air operations.

b. An airlift capability of a one division drop.

c. A division amphibious lift.



"8. Two U.S. divisions can be placed in Indochina in 30 days, and an additional 5 divisions in the following 120 days. This could be accomplished without reducing U.S. ground strength in the Far East to an unacceptable degree, but the U.S. ability to meet its NATO commitment would be seriously affected for a considerable period. The amount of time required to place 12 divisions in Indochina would depend upon the industrial and personnel mobilization measures taken by the government..." 11/

i. Defense-JCS "Solution": Rectify French Deficiencies

Faced with estimates that U.S. air-naval action could not turn the tide, and that U.S. ground forces of appropriate size would impinge upon other commitments, DoD and the JCS took the position that an alternative military solution existed within the reach of the French which required no U.S. intervention. DoD argued that the three reasons for France's deteriorating position were (1) lack of the will to win; (2) reluctance to meet Indochinese demands for true independence; (3) refusal to train indigenous personnel for military leadership. Defense believed that premature U.S. involvement would therefore beg the basic question of whether the U.S. was prepared to apply the strongest pressure on France, primarily in the European context, to attempt to force the French in Paris and in Indochina to take appropriate measures to rectify these deficiencies. Only if these measures were forthcoming, DoD held, should the U.S. seriously consider committing ground forces in defense of the interests of France and the Associated States. The net effect of the Defense-JCS position was to challenge the notion that a quick U.S. military action in Indochina would be either feasible or necessary.

3. The New Approach: "United Action"

At this juncture the Eisenhower Administration began giving serious consideration to broadening any American military intervention in Indochina by making it part of a collective venture along with its European and Asian allies. Secretary of State Dulles in a speech on March 29 warned the public of the alarming situation in Indochina and called for "united action" -- without defining it further -- in these words:

"Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that the possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today." 12/

Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, to which the Erskine working group had reported, issued a study on April 2. This report went beyond the question of holding Indochina and agreed that whatever that area's fate, the U.S. should begin developing a system of mutual defense for Southeast Asia. For the short term, the Smith Committee favored American sponsorship of a mutual defense treaty directed against Communist aggression in Indochina and Thailand. In the long run, it recommended promotion of a "regional and Asian mutual defense arrangement subscribed and underwritten by the major European powers with interests in the Pacific." 13/

The State Department's thinking in early April 1954 was not greatly at variance from that of Defense and the Smith Committee. Perhaps more so than Defense, State was concerned about the Chinese reaction to a U.S. military intervention. It urged caution and suggested that in any type of "united action" the U.S. make clear to both the Chinese and the allies that the intervention would not be aimed at the overthrow or destruction of the Peking regime. State recommended: (1) no U.S. military intervention for the moment, nor should it be promised to the French; (2) planning for military intervention continue; (3) discussions with potential allies on possibility of forming a regional grouping in the event of an unacceptable settlement at Geneva. 14/

a. Presidential Decision to Support Only "United Action"

Meanwhile, the President decided, following a meeting of Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, with Congressional leaders on April 3, that the U.S. would not undertake a unilateral intervention. Any U.S. military involvement in Indochina would be contingent upon (1) formation of a coalition force with U.S. allies to pursue "united action"; (2) declaration of French intent to accelerate independence of Associated States; (3) Congressional approval of U.S. involvement (which was thought to be dependent upon (1) and (2)).

These policy guidelines undoubtedly influenced the NSC which, at a meeting on April 6, developed the somewhat incompatible objectives that the U.S. (a) "intervene if necessary to avoid the loss of Indochina, but advocate that no steps be left untaken to get the French to achieve a successful conclusion of the war on their own" and (b) support as the best alternative to U.S. intervention a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation. 15/

The President accepted the NSC recommendations but decided that henceforth the Administration's primary efforts would be devoted toward: (1) organizing regional collective defense against Communist expansion; (2) gaining British support for U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia; (3) pressing France to accelerate its timetable for Indochinese independence. The President would seek Congressional approval for U.S. participation in a regional arrangement, if it could be put together, and meanwhile contingency planning for mobilization would commence. 16/



b. Rejection of Unilateral Intervention

Thus, as the curtain began to fall on the French effort at Dien Bien Phu, and the question of what the U.S. would do became critical, the U.S. Government backed away from unilateral intervention. The Defense Department was reluctant to intervene following the Army's presentation of the view that air-naval action alone would not do the job and ground forces would be needed. The very recent experience of the Korean War mitigated strongly against another American involvement in an Asian land war. Furthermore, the President was not willing to enter into such a venture unless it was cloaked with Congressional approval. Such approval, in turn, depended upon the participation of the allies. Hence, Secretary Dulles undertook the task of persuading Britain, France and the Asian allies to participate in a coalition for "united action" in Indochina.

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## II. B. 2. THE ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE "UNITED ACTION"

### 1. The Berlin Conference of 1954

Negotiations for a political settlement of the French-Viet Minh war were practically assured when it was decided at the Big Four meeting in Berlin in February 1954 that the Indochina question would be added to the agenda of an upcoming international conference at Geneva which was to discuss primarily a settlement of the Korean War. The period between the Berlin and Geneva conferences (i.e., between February and May 1954) unexpectedly witnessed a denouement of the Indochina drama with the siege and fall of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. decision not to intervene, and the unsuccessful U.S. attempt to rally its allies together in order to form a collective force in pursuance of "united action."

#### a. Viet Minh Strategy and French Attitudes

The half-year before the Berlin Foreign Ministers conference of February 1954 saw both a marked step up of Viet Minh military activity and the presentation of a peace feeler from Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnam Peoples Army (VPA) began to change its strategy against the French from guerrilla activities to conventional battle deployments. This was accompanied by an increase in the amount of Chinese military assistance, no doubt facilitated by the end of armed conflict in Korea. Thus, the Viet Minh appeared to be showing a newly found strength and confidence, although at the time the French refused to recognize this either publicly or to themselves.

Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh put out a peace feeler in late November 1953 in reply to a questionnaire submitted by a correspondent for the Swedish newspaper Expressen. The one pre-condition set by Ho for negotiations was French recognition of Vietnamese independence. In subsequent weeks, the peace feeler was repeated on several occasions, but each time it failed to indicate the place at which talks might be held, nor did it propose a scope for the talks. 1/

Nothing resulted directly from these peace feelers, but indirectly they added to the mounting public and political sentiment in France for an end to the seemingly interminable and costly war. The armistice agreement negotiated at Panmunjon in July 1953 served as an example which many Frenchmen hoped could be followed in the negotiation of a cease-fire with the DRV. A widespread disenchantment with the Indochina war pervaded France. This was reflected in public statements by Prime Minister Laniel that Paris would be satisfied with an "honorable solution" to the war.

The French then adopted a policy toward the war of "keep fighting -- seek talking." There was an increase in French military activity and confidence stimulated by the Navarre Plan, but this was offset by a growth in the size and influence of the peace faction in

France, as indicated by the "dovish" votes of the National Assembly favoring an early settlement of the protracted war. Premier Laniel and French officials told the U.S. Embassy that they considered the Ho Chi Minh offer pure propaganda, but said also that Ho's move had produced the intended impact on public and military circles in France and Indochina. Laniel mentioned that President Vincent Auriol had become so excited by Ho's proposal that he told Laniel "to consult representatives of three Associated States immediately with view to seeking earliest possible opening of negotiations with representatives of Ho Chi Minh. Laniel had flatly refused..." But American officials were skeptical. The U.S. Embassy reported that a Laniel speech of November 24, 1953, "left considerable latitude for negotiations," and that Ho's offers had increased the pressure for a settlement. 2/

b. Early U.S. Opposition to Negotiations

The consistent U.S. policy was to attempt to steer the French clear of the negotiating table pending substantial military gains on the battlefield. In bilateral U.S.-French talks in July, 1953, while the Korean armistice was being discussed at Panmunjom, Foreign Minister Bidault told Secretary Dulles that parallel talks should be pursued on Indochina. Bidault explained that the French public would never understand why negotiations were fit and honorable for Korea but were not for Indochina. A cease-fire in Korea, with nothing similar in prospect for Indochina, would make his government's position "absolutely impossible."

Secretary Dulles in reply stressed that "negotiations with no other alternative usually end in capitulation." In the Korean case, Dulles said, the alternative was the U.S. threat of "other and unpleasant measures" which the Communists realized we possessed. He urged the French to adopt the Navarre Plan, not only for military reasons, but because it would improve the French negotiating position. Dulles made it clear that the U.S. felt it was inadvisable to have the Indochina war inscribed on the agenda of a post-armistice political conference on Korea. 3/ The U.S. position at this time foreclosed negotiating on Indochina until after a Chinese decision to eliminate or cut down aid to the Viet Minh. 4/ In general, the U.S. sought to convince the French that military victory was the only guarantee of diplomatic success.

Dulles wished the French to continue the war because of his deep conviction that Indochina was a principal link in the line of the containment of Communism. In addition, Washington was undoubtedly influenced by optimistic reports on the progress of the war. General O'Daniel reported from Saigon that a French victory was likely if U.S. material support was forthcoming. On February 6, 1954, it was announced that forty B-26 bombers and 200 U.S. technicians to service them would be sent to Indochina. Admiral Radford told a House Foreign Relations Subcommittee, a month before the siege of Dien Bien Phu began (March, 1954), that the Navarre Plan was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war." 5/



At the Berlin Quadripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in February, however, Secretary Dulles was forced to give in on the French demand that Indochina be placed on the Geneva agenda. Bidault pressured the U.S. by threatening to scuttle the project for the European Defense Community which then was at the top of U.S. priorities. Dulles could not block Paris' determination to discuss Indochina at Geneva for it was, in the last analysis, France's war. He must have realized that the Laniel Government could not completely avoid negotiations without alienating itself from popular opinion and bringing about its downfall at the hands of the anti-war opposition parties.

The United States successfully opposed Soviet efforts at Berlin to gain for Communist China the status of a sponsoring power, and successfully held out, furthermore, for the inclusion in the Berlin communiqué of a statement that no diplomatic recognition, not already accorded, would be implied either in the invitation to, or the holding of, the Geneva Conference. 6/

## 2. The Ely Mission (March 20 - 24)

### a. Dien Bien Phu Begins

On March 13, 1954, the VPA, under the direct command of General Giap, began its assault upon Dien Bien Phu. This fortress in Northern Vietnam was to take on a political and psychological importance far out of proportion to its actual strategic value because of the upcoming Geneva Conference. The Viet Minh correctly foresaw that a show of decisive force, not to mention a victory, would markedly strengthen their hand at the conference. Further, a defeat of the French Union forces would sap the will of the French nation to continue the struggle. The Viet Minh were greatly helped by a substantial increase in the level of Chinese military aid including artillery and radar. 7/ As the battle developed, the optimism which had pervaded Washington statements, public and private, on the war was replaced with the conviction that unless new steps were taken to deal with Chinese aid, the French were bound to go under.

General Paul Ely, French Chief of Staff, arrived in Washington on March 20 to confer with U.S. officials on the war situation. Ely's principal aims were to obtain American assurance of air intervention in the event of Chinese aerial attack, and to obtain further U.S. material assistance, especially B-26 bombers. Dulles told Ely that he could not then answer regarding U.S. response to Chinese air intervention. 8/ Ely subsequently contended in his Mémoires that he received a promise from Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to push for prompt American approval of interdiction should the contingency arise. 9/ As to the supply of bombers, twenty-five additional B-26's were promised.

### b. Operation Vulture (Vautour)

According to subsequent French reports, General Ely was asked to stay 24 hours longer than planned in Washington, during which time Admiral Radford made an informal but major proposal to him. Radford is said to have suggested a nighttime raid against the perimeter of

Dien Bien Phu by aircraft of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. The plan, named Operation Vulture, called for about sixty B-29's to take off from Clark Field near Manila, under escort of 150 fighters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, to conduct a massive strike against VPA positions on the perimeter of Dien Bien Phu. 10/

Operation Vulture, according to French sources, was conceived by a joint American-French military staff in Saigon. It is admitted to have been an informal proposal which had not as yet received full U.S. Government backing as policy. No record of Operation Vulture has been found in files examined. In an interview in 1965, Admiral Radford stated that no plans for "Operation Vulture" existed, since planning to aid Dien Bien Phu by an air strike never proceeded beyond the conceptual stage. 11/ Nevertheless, such an operation probably was the subject of informal discussions both in Vietnam, and between Radford and Ely.

3. "United Action" as an Alternative to Either Negotiations or to Unilateral U.S. Intervention

a. Formulation of U.S. Policy

By late March the internal debate within the Eisenhower Administration had reached the point where it was recognized that: (a) unilateral U.S. intervention in the Indochina War would not be effective without ground forces; (b) the involvement of U.S. ground forces was logistically and politically undesirable; (c) preferably, "free world" intervention in Indochina to save the area from communism would take the form of a collective operation by allied forces. This was the import of the NSC deliberations, the Ridgway Report, the Report of Under Secretary of State W. Bedell Smith's Special Committee on the U.S. and Indochina, and President Eisenhower's general train of thought (see Tab 1).

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in his discussions with General Ely went beyond the question of immediate assistance to the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu and broached the possible establishment of a regional defense arrangement for Southeast Asia.

This proposal was given public exposure in Secretary Dulles' speech of March 29 before the Overseas Press Club. Dulles described the importance of resisting communist aggression in Indochina in these words:

"If the Communist forces were to win uncontested control over Indo-China or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against the other free peoples in that area.

"The propagandists of Red China and of Soviet Russia make it perfectly apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia.



"Now Southeast Asia is an important part of the world. It is the so-called 'rice bowl' ... It is an area that is rich in many raw materials ...

"And in addition to these tremendous economic values, the area has great strategic value ... Communist control of Southeast Asia would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand ... The entire western Pacific area, including the so-called 'offshore island chain,' would be strategically endangered."

He then went on call for "united action," and after noting Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh, prophesied that aggression would "lead to action in places by means of the free world's choosing, so that the aggression would surely cost more than it would gain." 12/

In the following weeks the aim of U.S. diplomacy was to secure allied agreement to a collective defense pact consisting of ten nations: the U.S., France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the three Associated States. Secretary Dulles presented his proposal in discussions with British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins and French Ambassador Henri Bonnet. President Eisenhower addressed a personal message to Prime Minister Churchill explaining the proposed coalition. The President noted that:

"Geneva is less than four weeks away. There the possibility of the Communists driving a wedge between us will, given the state of mind in France, be infinitely greater than at Berlin. I can understand the very natural desire of the French to seek an end to this war which has been bleeding them for eight years. But our painstaking search for a way out of the impasse has reluctantly forced us to the conclusion that there is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in its essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a Communist retirement. The first alternative is too serious in its broad strategic implications for us and for you to be acceptable....

"Somehow we must contrive to bring about the second alternative."

President Eisenhower went on to outline the need for a coalition willing to fight the Communists, if this proved necessary. He concluded with a historical question certain to appeal to Churchill:

"If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unit and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?..." 13/

In these discussions the United States sought generally to stiffen the will of the free nations in the Indochina crisis. It emphasized both the avowed intention of France to grant real independence to the Associated States, and the condition accepted by the French at Berlin for the United States' agreeing to discuss Indochina at Geneva. That condition was that France would not agree to any arrangement which would directly or indirectly result in the turnover of Indochina to the Communists. The United States sought solid support for this position, especially from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Although the possibility was held out of future involvement of the United Nations in the Indochina problem, there was no thought of immediate UN action.14/

b. Initial Allied Reaction to "United Action"

Thailand and the Philippines gave a favorable response to the call for united action. The British response was one of caution and hesitancy. Churchill accepted Eisenhower's suggestion that Secretary Dulles go to London for further talks, but the British saw dangers in pressing for a defensive coalition before the Geneva conference. Eden was determined not to be "hustled into injudicious military decisions." As Eden later wrote:

"I welcomed the American proposal for the organization of collective defence in South-East Asia, since this would contribute to the security of Malaya and Hong Kong and would remove the anomaly of our exclusion from the A.N.Z.U.S. Pact, to which the United States, Australia and New Zealand were party. But I felt that to form and proclaim a defensive coalition, before we went to the conference table, would be unlikely to help us militarily and would harm us politically, by frightening off important potential allies. By the beginning of May, the rains would be starting in Indo-China and extensive campaigning by either side would be impossible for several months. Since the complete collapse of the French military effort before then was improbable, I did not think that concern for the immediate military situation should be the guiding factor in our policy." 15/

c. French Call for U.S. Intervention at Dien Bien Phu (April 4-5)

The French response to the proposal for united action was overtaken by military events at Dien Bien Phu. Foreign Minister Bidault contended on April 5 that the time for a coalition approach had passed and that the fate of Dien Bien Phu would be decided in the next ten days. 16/ The previous day Ambassador Douglas Dillon was called to an emergency Sunday cabinet meeting and was informed by Bidault, in the company of Laniel, that "immediate armed intervention of U.S. carrier aircraft at Dien Bien Phu is now necessary to save the situation." Bidault, reporting Navarre's desperate state in the field and the extent of Chinese



intervention in support of General Giap's forces, asked the Ambassador point-blank for U.S. action, saying that "the fate of Southeast Asia now rested on Dien Bien Phu," and that "Geneva would be won or lost depending on outcome" of the battle. 17/ The United States was now being called upon to act quickly and unilaterally to save a local situation, rather than, as Dulles desired, in concert with Asian and Western Allies.

#### d. U.S. Decision Not to Intervene Unilaterally

In the first week of April it became clear that the question of U.S. intervention was now crucial. Fighting at Dien Bien Phu reached major proportions as Chinese-supplied artillery pounded the French and drove them backwards. Without an early intervention by an external power, or group of powers, the French position at Dien Bien Phu was likely to be overrun. In anticipation of the French request for intervention, the Eisenhower Administration decided to consult with Congressional leaders. The President appears to have thought that Congressional support was vital for whatever active role the U.S. might now take in Indochina.

Available Government documents do not provide details of the two meetings to be described below. However, on the basis of seemingly reliable published sources, it appears that on April 3 Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford met with eight Congressmen (three Republicans and five Democrats) at the State Department. 18/ Radford apparently outlined a plan for an air strike on the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) at Dien Bien Phu using 200 planes from the aircraft carriers Essex and Boxer, stationed on maneuvers in the South China Sea. An unsuccessful air strike might need to be followed by a second air strike, but ground forces were not envisaged at this stage. It has been averred that there were atomic bombs on the aircraft carriers which could be delivered by the planes, but there is no indication that there was any serious consideration given to using nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu or elsewhere in Indochina. In the event of a massive Chinese troop intervention, however, it is quite possible that the U.S. would have retaliated with strategic nuclear weapons against targets in China.

The Congressional leaders raised questions about the amount of allied support for such an action, about the position of the other Joint Chiefs, about the need for ground forces if a second air strike also failed, and about the danger of a mammoth Chinese intervention which could transform Indochina into another Korean-type war. Radford apparently was forced to admit that he was the only one of the Joint Chiefs who favored the intervention plan. Dulles conceded that the allies had not as yet been consulted. In consequence, Dulles, who had been thinking of a joint Congressional resolution authorizing Presidential use of U.S. air-naval power in Indochina (which it is alleged he had ready in his pocket) left the meeting without the vital support he needed. The Congressional leaders laid down three conditions necessary for their support: (a) formation of an allied "coalition"-type force; (b) a French declaration



indicating an intent to accelerate independence for the Associated States; (c) French agreement to continue their Expeditionary Corps in Indochina. Thus Congressional opposition put the brake on a possible unilateral U.S. intervention. 19/ According to a subsequent State Department Summary:

"It was the sense of the meeting that the U.S. should not intervene alone but should attempt to secure the cooperation of other free nations concerned in Southeast Asia, and that if such cooperation could be assured, it was probable that the U.S. Congress would authorize U.S. participation in such 'United Action.'" 20/

The following day, April 4, Dulles and Radford met with the President at the White House. The President reached the decision to intervene only upon the satisfaction of the three conditions necessary for the U.S. "to commit belligerent acts" in Indochina. There would have to be a coalition "with active British Commonwealth participation"; a "full political understanding with France and other countries," and Congressional approval. 21/

President Eisenhower clearly did not want the U.S. to intervene alone. He also was very concerned with having broad Congressional support for any step which might involve the U.S. in a war. As Sherman Adams later observed:

"Having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea when he had United Nations support, he [Eisenhower] was in no mood to provoke another one in Indo-China by going it alone in a military action without the British and other Western Allies. He was also determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress. He had had trouble enough convincing some Senators that it was even necessary to send small groups of noncombatant Air Force technicians to Indo-China." 22/

e. British Oppose "United Action"

From April 11 to 14, Secretary Dulles visited London and Paris to attempt to obtain British and French commitments to support his proposal for "United Action." According to President Eisenhower, Dulles felt that he had been given assurance of Congressional support for "United Action" if the allies approved his plan. 23/

Dulles found the British opposed to any type of collective military action prior to the Geneva Conference. Dulles explained, according to Eden's account, that the U.S. had concluded that the French could no longer deal with the situation in Indochina, militarily or politically, alone. If the French position in Indochina collapsed, the consequences in the rest of Southeast Asia would be grave. U.S. air and naval forces were



ready to intervene and some aircraft carriers had already been moved from Manila to the Indochina coast. On reflection, said Dulles, he had thought that the U.S. should not act alone in this matter and that an ad hoc coalition might be formed which might develop later into a Southeast Asia defense organization. This in itself would deter China from further interference in Indochina and would strengthen the western position at Geneva by giving evidence of solidarity. 24/

Eden was not convinced. He drew a distinction between the long term issue of collective security in Southeast Asia -- which might well be guaranteed by treaty after Geneva -- and the more immediate question of "united action" in Indochina. He was opposed to any military action or warning announcement before Geneva. The British were willing to provide the French with full diplomatic support at Geneva, either as a guarantor of the final settlement or as a participant in multilateral talks if a settlement failed to materialize. In the latter case, the British were prepared to discuss a collective defense formula that would comprehend any non-Communist portion of Indochina formed as the result of the Geneva deliberations. But they would not, prior to Geneva, commit themselves to united action.

Britain's distinction between the appropriateness of a united approach after, as opposed to before, the Conference was founded on serious doubts about the true import of united action. As Dulles correctly judged, behind Britain's push for a settlement was the "fear that if fighting continues, we will in one way or another become involved, thereby enhancing risk of Chinese intervention and possibility further expansion of war." 25/ Eden charged that action prior to the Conference would not only destroy chances for a peaceful settlement, but would critically raise the risk of a wider war. American planning admitted the strong possibility of direct Chinese intervention, and his own intelligence staff had concluded that Western involvement would bring on the Chinese by land and air once the Viet Minh effort became "seriously endangered." 26/

Thus, while Dulles was angered at the way he felt the British were writing off Indochina, Eden was highly pessimistic about Dulles' militancy in an area of uncertain value for which the United States had ambiguous, high-risk plans. There was considerable difference, in Eden's mind, between warnings to Communist China against direct intervention before the fact (which the British went along with in mid-1953) and united action, which would, despite any allied assurances to Peking, be interpreted by the Chinese as provocative. 27/

British suspicions, furthermore, were an extension of the belief that Indochina need not be entirely lost at Geneva in the absence of united action. London was apparently puzzled by American talk of the "loss" of Indochina, for to 10 Downing Street, "French cannot lose the war between now /April 1954/ and the coming of the rainy season however badly they may conduct it." 28/ While Dulles kept telling the British that only united action through the formation of a coalition could ensure

against a complete Communist diplomatic triumph at Geneva, Eden was equally convinced that the best way to assure continuation of the war would be united action, and that the French, even after Dien Bien Phu, were still strong enough to prevent the Communists from gaining all Indochina.

Even before Dulles' April flight to London to sound out the British on united action, the Churchill government was closely questioning American evaluations of Indochina. In an April 1 cable, for instance, Dulles vented his disturbance at Britain's refusal to accept the view that the loss of Indochina would ultimately affect their security interests in Malaya, Australia, and New Zealand. 29/ This was indeed the case, as Dulles discovered for himself once he talked to Eden in London and later at Geneva. Eden steadfastly refused to buy Dulles' analogy between Indochina and Malaya, retorting that the situation in Malaya was "well in hand" while that in Indochina was clearly not. 30/ Admiral Radford concluded in late April from talks with the British chiefs of staff that the U.K. policy seemed "to be on a very narrow basis strictly in terms of local U.K. interest without regard to other areas of the Far East such as Japan." 31/

The British simply could not accept the domino principle even as they admitted Southeast Asia's security value to the free world. By the opening of the Geneva Conference, the U.S.-U.K. relations had reached a low point: Dulles was insisting that the British were the major roadblock to implementation of united action, while Eden was clinging to the notion that a negotiated settlement leading to partition would be the best outcome of an impossibly complex politico-military situation in Indochina.

#### f. French Oppose "United Action"

Secretary Dulles fared little better in selling "united action" in Paris than he did in London, but for somewhat different reasons. The French were seeking a quick action to avoid an imminent military defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Dulles, however, refused to be torn from a collective allied approach to the Indochina War. The French feared that a coalition arrangement would lead to an internationalization of the war and take control of it out of their hands. They, therefore, only desired local assistance at Dien Bien Phu along the lines of Operation Vulture.

Furthermore, another objection to "united action" from the French viewpoint was that it would only delay or impede the very negotiations leading towards a settlement which the French increasingly desired. The U.S. objective was to keep alive the French determination to continue the war. Dulles feared that the French would use Geneva to find a face-saving formula for a French surrender. Premier Laniel reaffirmed to Dulles in Paris that his government would take no action which directly or indirectly turned Indochina over to the Communists. But he also called attention to the increasing desire on the part of many in France to get out of Indochina at any cost. The French stressed that it was necessary



to await the results of the Geneva Conference and that they could not give the impression in advance that they believed Geneva would fail. 32/

g. Aborted Working Group on Collective Defense in Southeast Asia (April 20)

Immediately upon returning to Washington on April 15 Secretary Dulles invited representatives of the United Kingdom, France, the Associated States, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand to attend a meeting on the 20th to set up an ad hoc defense group for the Southeast Asia region. The delegates were to work on a draft for a future organization. The Secretary had been under the impression from his talk in London with Eden that the U.K., while rejecting immediate "united action" in Indochina, would have no objection to such a preliminary meeting.

On April 18, just two days before the scheduled meeting, the British Ambassador informed Dulles that there would be no British participation. The reasons: no understanding on the part of the British Foreign Secretary that the working group would go forward at once, and no agreement concerning membership. The Department expressed amazement, but in view of the British attitude the April 20 meeting was transformed into a general briefing for the nations comprising the allied side at the Geneva Conference. In a later explanation of the shift in British attitude, Foreign Secretary Eden said that in agreeing to informal working group talks he had overlooked the pending Colombo Conference and that he felt that it would have been most undesirable to give any public indication of membership in a program for united action before the end of the Colombo discussions. 33/ It is now clear that the British were restrained by India and by a fear that British attendance at the meeting would be construed as assent to "united action." 34/ Moreover, London could not have been reassured by a "trial balloon" speech of Vice President Nixon on April 17 in which he suggested that the U.S. might have to "take the risk now by putting our boys in" in order to avoid "further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina." 35/

h. Continued French Prodding for U.S. Intervention (April 21-25)

In preparation for the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference, tripartite discussions (U.S., U.K., France) took place in Paris in mid-April. In these discussions, the French contended that a successful Geneva settlement was dependent on a favorable outcome of the battle at Dien Bien Phu and that their participation in a Southeast Asian coalition might not be possible if Dien Bien Phu fell. There could be no guarantee what position France would take in the event of a collapse at Dien Bien Phu. The French argued that only large-scale United States air and naval intervention could retrieve the situation in Indochina. They made no formal request for intervention in the tripartite discussions, but on several occasions suggested or implied to the Americans that such action was necessary. 36/

On April 21, Marc Jacquet, French Secretary of State for the Associated States, told the American Ambassador to Indochina, Donald Heath, then in Paris, that no French military authority still believed a victory was possible in Indochina without United States air and naval intervention, and that such action should be indicated after the impending failure of the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference. 37/

On April 22, Foreign Minister Bidault, with General Ely, suggested to Secretary Dulles that there should be emergency consultation between General Navarre and American military commanders in Indochina. The Foreign Minister indicated that, although he had been opposed to internationalizing the war, he would now favor it with United States participation if that would save Dien Bien Phu. 38/

On April 23 the French Under Secretary of State, André Bougenot, in the presence of Premier Laniel, suggested to Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor of the Department of State, that the United States could commit its naval aircraft to the battle at Dien Bien Phu without risking American prestige or committing an act of belligerency by placing such aircraft, painted with French insignia and construed as part of the French Foreign Legion, under nominal French command for an isolated action consisting of air strikes lasting two or three days. 39/

On the same day Foreign Minister Bidault showed the Secretary a message from General Navarre in which the French commander said that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was desperate and that he believed that the only alternatives were (1) Operation VAULTOUR, massive B-29 bombing (which Secretary Dulles understood would be a United States operation from bases outside Indochina), or (2) a French Union request for a cease-fire (which the Secretary assumed would be at Dien Bien Phu only, but which General Navarre, as it turned out, meant should apply to all of Indochina). 40/

#### 4. Final U.S. Position Before Geneva

##### a. Exchanges with the French

The American response to these various suggestions was to reiterate to the French the necessary preconditions for American intervention: (1) complete independence for the Associated States; (2) Congressional authorization; (3) a coalition that would include the United Kingdom. 41/ In relation to the need for a coalition, Secretary Dulles in Paris and Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith in Washington suggested to French officials that France, in the same way as it had asked for American air intervention in Indochina, should appeal for British intervention there. 42/

Before leaving Paris for Geneva, Secretary Dulles gave Foreign Minister Bidault a letter replying to General Navarre's suggestion that United States air intervention at Dien Bien Phu was the sole alternative to a cease-fire. In this letter, the Secretary stated again the necessary



preconditions for United States intervention, and contended that if Dien Bien Phu fell there was no reason that this should make it necessary to plead for a cease-fire. 43/ The French Foreign Minister, in a letter limited to the military consequences of United States intervention, replied that in the opinion of French military experts "a massive intervention of American aviation would still be able to save the garrison." 44/

b. Exchanges with the U.K.

In the discussions with the British, meanwhile, the United States had tried both to induce the United Kingdom to participate in a joint Anglo-American air and naval intervention at Dien Bien Phu and to persuade the United Kingdom that the prompt organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia was necessary to bolster the French in Indochina. 45/

But the British indicated that they would make no commitment to intervene militarily in Indochina and wished to postpone conversations on collective defense arrangements until after the Geneva Conference. Foreign Secretary Eden told Secretary Dulles on April 24 that the British did not want at this juncture to intervene in the Indochina War. 46/ Immediately afterward Eden returned to London for a special Cabinet meeting on the Indochina crisis which was held on April 25. Prime Minister Churchill reported to the House of Commons two days later that the British Government was "not prepared to give any undertakings about United Kingdom military action in Indochina in advance of the results of Geneva," and had "not entered into any new political or military commitments." 47/ Before addressing the Commons, Churchill had rejected a plea from French Ambassador René Massigli, made on behalf of Premier Laniel, for a statement that Great Britain would join the United States and France in defense of Dien Bien Phu. 48/

The United Kingdom was willing, however, to participate in early military discussions to consider measures which might be taken in Southeast Asia if Indochina were lost. Along these lines, Foreign Secretary Eden and Secretary Dulles had discussed tentatively on April 22 the possibility of a secret military appraisal -- by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand -- of what could be done to bolster Thailand in the event of a French collapse in Indochina. The Foreign Secretary had returned to this proposition in another conversation with Secretary Dulles the next day. 49/

On April 30, indicating that the British were prepared to defend the area outside Indochina, and possibly the free part of a partitioned Indochina, Eden proposed to Secretary Dulles "an immediate and secret joint examination of the political and military problems in creating a collective defense for Southeast Asia, namely: (a) nature and purpose; (b) membership; (c) commitments." He added that this examination should also cover immediate measures to strengthen Thailand. 50/

Secretary Dulles raised the question of early military talks that might strengthen the French position at the Geneva Conference at a meeting in Geneva on May 2 with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, partners of the United States in the ANZUS organization. The three agreed at this meeting that there should be five-power military talks in Washington among the ANZUS powers, the United Kingdom, and France, with the possible participation of Thailand. 51/

c. The Washington Viewpoint

In Washington in the meantime, the President on April 26, the opening date of the Geneva Conference, told a group of Republican leaders that it would be a "tragic error" for the United States to intervene unilaterally as a partner of France in the Indochina struggle. 52/ Two days later, in a discussion with Under Secretary W. Bedell Smith, Presidential Assistant Robert Cutler, and Admiral Radford (who had just been to London and had talked with the British Chiefs of Staff and Prime Minister Churchill), 53/ the President expressed disappointment over the British attitude of refraining from active participation in discussions on a Southeast Asian collective security arrangement before the end of the Geneva Conference. President Eisenhower, in this discussion, reiterated his firm decision that there would be no United States military intervention in Indochina by executive action. He urged his aides to provide help to the French in repairing three airfields in Indochina but to avoid any undue risk of involving the United States in combat operations. 54/

The feasibility of American intervention at Dien Bien Phu was finally removed with the fall of that fortress on May 7. President Eisenhower sent messages to the President of France, René Coty, and to the Chief of State of Vietnam, Bao Dai, praising the defenders of Dien Bien Phu and stressing the determination of the free world to remain "faithful to the causes for which they fought." 55/

5. Reappraisal of Domino Theory After Dien Bien Phu

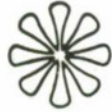
The fall of Dien Bien Phu, and the failure to organize an intervention through "united action" prior to the opening of the Geneva Conference in late April, 1954, led to a reappraisal of the "domino theory" which had been at the center of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia since the late 1940's. The loss of Tonkin, or Vietnam, or perhaps even all of Indochina, was no longer considered to lead inexorably to the loss to Communism of all of Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, Secretary Dulles in a press conference on May 11 (four days after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu) observed that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without perhaps Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." He went on to note that although he would not want to underestimate the importance of these countries he would not want either to give the impression that "if events that we could not control, and which we do not anticipate, should lead to their being lost that we would



consider the whole situation hopeless and we would give up in despair ..."  
56/ In a remark at the press conference that was later deleted from the  
official transcript, Dulles said that Laos and Cambodia were "important  
but by no means essential" because they were poor countries with meager  
populations. 57/

Later, as the U.S. became reconciled to a political settlement  
at Geneva which would yield northern Vietnam to the Ho Chi Minh regime,  
the concept of "united action" was given a new twist. It now was trans-  
formed into an attempt to organize a long-range collective defense alliance  
which would offset the setback in Indochina and prevent further losses.  
That long-feared setback was now perceived to be less serious than had  
once been envisaged. The loss of Tonkin was no longer seen as leading  
necessarily to a Communist take-over of other territory between China and  
the American shore. Eventually, in SEATO, the U.S. sought to create an  
alliance which would be strong enough to withstand the fall of one such  
domino.



# **UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS**

## **1945 - 1967**

**III**

**THE GENEVA ACCORDS**

**1954**



1954Foreword

This part of the study examines the Geneva Conference of 1954. Section A deals with U.S. positions before and during the conference. Section B discusses the role of the Bao Dai Government of Vietnam during Geneva, and its consequent obligations. Section C relates the Viet Minh position at Geneva to overall objectives and strategy of the communist powers. The final portion, Section D, analyzes the outcome of the conference as viewed first by the communists, then by the West, and finally as its spirit and effects can be seen in objective retrospect.

- A. U.S. Military Planning and Diplomatic Maneuver, January-July, 1954
- B. Role and Obligations of the State of Vietnam
- C. The Viet Minh Position and Sino-Soviet Strategy
- D. The Intent of the Geneva Accords

### III. A. U.S. MILITARY PLANNING AND DIPLOMATIC MANEUVER, JANUARY-JULY 1954

#### SUMMARY

It is charged that the U.S. tried to sabotage the Geneva Conference, first by maneuvering to prevent the conference from taking place, then by attempting to subvert a settlement, and finally, by refusing to guarantee the resulting agreements of the conference. The documentation on this charge is complete, but by no means unambiguous. While "sabotage" may be a strong word, it is evident that the U.S. by its actions and statements during this period did seek to down-play the conference, disassociate itself from the results, and thereby did cast doubt on the stability of the accords.

After the Big Four Conference at Berlin in February, 1954, U.S. efforts were directed at preventing a French collapse in Vietnam prior to a settlement at Geneva. If the conference were to take place, the U.S. believed that any settlement likely to result would be contrary to U.S. interests. The U.S. aim was, therefore, to take the emphasis off the conference and put it back onto the battlefield. This renewed emphasis on a military approach was put in the context of what Washington referred to as "united action," of the same character as UN intervention in Korea -- broad, multi-lateral, and military. Even as the French-Vietnamese military position continued to deteriorate on the battlefield, the U.S. became more convinced than ever of the need for decisive military victory. The recent experience of Korea only served to convince Washington that meaningful compromise with the communists was impossible. The U.S., however, did have to react to French proposals for a peace conference, and did so by insisting on a strong French stand, bolstered by continued fighting while negotiations were in progress. Moreover, the U.S. threatened to "disassociate" itself from the conference if the results were not favorable to the West (Tab 1).

As the conference became more of a reality, the U.S. aim was to keep the united action option open in the event that France would find the course of negotiations at Geneva unpalatable. Washington was convinced that the conference would fail because of communist intransigence and that, therefore, France would have no choice but to turn to the united action alternative. France wanted U.S. military support, but was reluctant to pay its price. The price was U.S. insistence on complete independence for the Associated States of Indochina as soon as possible. The U.S. would make no pledges to France, moreover, without firm and broad allied support -- support which was never forthcoming on the military side. France, unwilling to accept the prerequisites for U.S. intervention, and under domestic pressure, decided to pursue a political settlement at the conference table rather than united military action. Nevertheless, France used these U.S. conditions and the united action option as a lever at the conference. When the French situation in Indochina deteriorated beyond



the point that U.S. military assistance would be profitable, and after seeing the futility of organizing united action, Dulles withdrew the option (Tab 2).

As the negotiations at the conference progressed, Washington shifted its weight away from intervention through united action and instead concentrated on unifying the West into a regional military pact and creating a united diplomatic front at the conference to obtain the best possible settlement for the West. The implied threat of U.S. intervention, however, was allowed to remain. Throughout July of 1954, then, united action took on a futuristic bent -- as a Free World Regional Defense Organization (ultimately to become SEATO) to secure Laos, Cambodia, and a "retained Vietnam" -- after the conference completed its work. Diplomatically, the U.S. took the initiative in forming a seven-point negotiating position with the British, a position which was, in large part, ultimately accepted by France. Except for a provision admitting the inescapability of a partitioned Vietnam, the seven-point program was a maximum western position. Yet, even as we urged our desires on France, we made clear that we would not be able to sign, guarantee, or associate ourselves with any accord. The U.S. role was to be passive and formal and firmly against co-signing any document with the communists. In effect, the U.S. delegation attempted to forward its ideas on a proper settlement to the "active negotiators" representing western interests. The U.S. would do nothing to impair its future flexibility with respect to Indochina. As matters turned out at the conference, the final terms of the settlement came close to meeting seven Anglo-American conditions (Tab 3).

#### DISCUSSION

- III. A. Tab 1 - U.S. Pre-conference Maneuvers - January-April 1954
- 2 - U.S. and French on United Action, May-Mid June 1954
- 3 - U.S. Negotiating Position During the Conference

III. A. 1.

U.S. PRE-CONFERENCE MANEUVERS, JANUARY-APRIL 1954

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### III. A. 1. U.S. PRE-CONFERENCE MANEUVERS, JANUARY-APRIL 1954

#### 1. U.S. Aims to Keep the Fight on the Battlefield

##### a. U.S. Opposed to Geneva Conference

Negotiation of a settlement of the Indochina War was never happily accepted by the United States. Consistently, Washington took the position that France should negotiate only from a posture of clear military advantage which, assuming success of the Navarre Plan, would not come about until some time in 1955. While recognizing strong pressures in the French National Assembly and among the French public for peace, the U.S., clearly influenced by the experience at Panmunjom, hoped to convince the Laniel government against making a premature commitment to talks with the Viet Minh. The U.S. could not prevent Laniel from expressing publicly his administration's desire for peace, but sought to persuade him against actually sitting down at the bargaining table. As late as December 1953, Laniel agreed that Washington's approach was the correct one. 1/ Two months later, however, the picture had changed. At Berlin, the Big Four decision to convene an international conference on Indochina at Geneva evidenced the irresistible pressure in French government circles for talks with the Viet Minh.

##### b. Alternatives to Military Victory Appear Infeasible

Compelled to go along with Anglo-French preference for negotiating with the communists, the U.S. nevertheless did not shake its pessimism over the probable results. Our position remained that nothing short of military victory could settle the Indochina War in a manner favorable to Free World interests. The rationale behind this unequivocal perspective on negotiations was first set out fully by the JCS in March 1954, when the Chiefs examined the alternatives to military victory and found them all infeasible or unacceptable to the U.S. A cease-fire prior to a political settlement, the JCS paper stated, probably would "lead to a political stalemate attended by a concurrent and irretrievable deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position." A coalition government would lead to communist seizure of power from within, with the U.S. helpless to prevent it. Partition, on the other hand, would amount to recognition of communist success by force of arms, cession to the communists of the key Tonkin Delta, and undercutting of our containment policy in Asia.

##### c. Elections Would Be Subverted

The Chiefs also commented at some length on the difficult question of elections. They took the position that even if elections in Vietnam could be carried out along democratic lines (which they doubted), a communist victory would almost certainly result because of communist territorial control, popular support, and superior tactics:



"Such factors as the prevalence of illiteracy, the lack of suitable educational media, and the absence of adequate communications in the outlying areas would render the holding of a truly representative plebiscite of doubtful feasibility. The Communists, by virtue of their superior capability in the field of propaganda, could readily pervert the issue as being a choice between national independence and French Colonial rule. Furthermore, it would be militarily infeasible to prevent widespread intimidation of voters by Communist partisans. While it is obviously impossible to make a dependable forecast as to the outcome of a free election, current intelligence leads the Joint Chiefs to the belief that a settlement based upon free elections would be attended by almost certain loss of the Associated States to Communist control."

The JCS views, together with their recommendation that the U.S. not associate itself with any settlement that "would fail to provide reasonably adequate assurance of the future political and territorial integrity of Indochina..." were approved by the Secretary of Defense on 23 March. 2/

#### d. The U.S. Proposes United Action

Secretary Dulles on March 29 publicly proposed collective military operations as a future course of action for the "free world" in Indochina. Dulles suggested the organization of a ten-nation collective defense alliance for Southeast Asia. 3/ Such a coalition was the U.S. Government's preferred alternative to unilateral U.S. intervention, either at Dien Bien Phu, or subsequently in a more general context. With the climax at Dien Bien Phu approaching, the inter-agency debate in Washington had made clear that American intervention there solely with air and naval forces was neither desirable nor feasible, and there was little support for a ground intervention. United action also was the result of the Eisenhower's Administration's inability to marshal support among Congressional leaders for a unilateral U.S. intervention without participation by the allies. President Eisenhower himself clearly preferred intervention through united action to a purely American undertaking.

The united action proposal, however, was not acceptable either to the British or to the French before the Geneva Conference. The British thought that any military intervention under united action prior to Geneva would impede a political settlement at the Conference and most likely lead to a further expansion of the war, including a

possible Chinese intervention. London, therefore, was only willing to consider the establishment of a collective defense alliance in Southeast Asia after the Geneva Conference. France saw Dulles' proposal for united action as a parry of the urgent French request for immediate U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Initially, the French feared that united action would internationalize the war and thereby place it beyond control of Paris. Later, the French came to fear that united action would be used as a device to impede negotiations. For these reasons, the American proposal for united action failed to gather support either in Paris or in London before Geneva.

e. U.S. Discourages Early Cease-fire

In the months before the conference, the U.S. maintained an adamant opposition to any course other than full prosecution of the war. Dulles told French Ambassador Henri Bonnet on 3 April, for instance, that a negotiated settlement would lead only to face-saving formulae for either a French or a Viet Minh surrender. The Secretary termed a division of Indochina "impractical" and a coalition government the "beginning of disaster." Writing to Churchill on 4 April, Eisenhower echoed this line, asserting: "There is no negotiated solution of the Indochina problem which in essence would not be either a face-saving device to cover a French surrender or a face-saving device to cover a communist retirement." And it was precisely to bring about the latter -- China's "discreet disengagement" -- that the President wanted British cooperation in "united action." 4/

The U.S. was concerned that a disaster at Dien Bien Phu would propel the French into acceptance of an immediate cease-fire even before the conference could begin. Dulles obtained assurances from Bidault that the French would not adopt that approach. 5/ The British did not share U.S. fears. Eden doubted that a cease-fire would lead either to a massacre of the French or to large-scale infiltration of French-held terrain by Viet Minh forces. 6/



## 2. Events Make the Geneva Conference Inevitable

### a. U.S. Plans Initial Geneva Position

Assured that the French would not cease fire prior to the conference, Washington forged ahead in late April and early May in search of a policy that would guide the American delegation. The National Security Council, less than a week before the opening conference session, carefully examined American alternatives. 7/ The NSC urged the President not to join the Geneva deliberations without assurance from France that it was not preparing to negotiate the surrender of Indochina. Again, the Korean example was foremost: Communist tactics, the NSC said, will likely resemble those at Panmunjom: a cease-fire with lack of compliance by the communists because of ineffective supervision, a wilting French position before the communists' typical dilatory tactics, all resulting in the French accepting almost any terms.

### b. NSC Recommends Strong U.S. Stand

The NSC, therefore, decided that the French had to be pressured into adopting a strong posture in the face of probable communist intransigence. The NSC urged a policy of informing Paris that its acquiescence in a communist takeover of Indochina would bear not only on France's future position in the Far East, but also on its status as one of the Big Three; that abandonment of Indochina would grievously affect both France's position in North Africa and Franco-U.S. relations in that region; that U.S. aid to France would automatically cease upon Paris' conclusion of an unsatisfactory settlement; and, finally, that communist domination of Indochina would be of such serious strategic harm to U.S. interests as to produce "consequences in Europe as well as elsewhere [without]...apparent limitation." In addition, the NSC recommended that the U.S. determine immediately whether the Associated States should be approached with a view to continuing the anti-Viet Minh struggle in some other form, including unilateral U.S. involvement "if necessary."

### c. Dulles Announces Possibility of U.S. Disassociation

The NSC's adamant attitude was reflected in Dulles' extreme pessimism over the prospects for any meaningful progress in talks with the communists. At Geneva on April 25, the Secretary said that the solution of the Indochina problem was the primary responsibility of France, the non-Communist Vietnamese, and the Viet Minh. The U.S. would not normally expect to "interpose [its] veto" except "where we felt that the issues involved had a pretty demonstrable interest to the United States itself." And he went on to say that if highly disadvantageous solutions were proposed at the conference which the U.S. could not prevent, "we would probably want to disassociate ourselves from it [the Conference]." 8/

d. Dulles Deprecates Partition

This first official indication for public consumption of U.S. refusal to join in a settlement contrary to our interests, was coupled with a comment by Dulles on the possibility of partition. In views that would change later, Dulles said he did not see how partition could be arranged with the fighting not confined to any single area. Although he did not actually rule out partition, he made it clear that the U.S. would agree only to a division equivalent to a communist surrender, one that would place all the communist troops in a small regroupment area out of harm's way. But that arrangement "might not be acceptable to them," he said coyly.

3. U.S. Makes Final Preparations for Geneva

a. French Inform U.S. of Opening Proposals

The test of U.S. policy came May 5 when the French informed Washington of the proposals they intended to make in the first round of talks. The proposals included a separation of the Vietnam situation of "civil war" from the communist aggressions in Cambodia and Laos; a cease-fire supervised by international authority, to be followed by political discussions aimed at free elections; the regrouping of regular forces of the belligerents into defined zones upon signature of a cease-fire agreement; the disarming of all irregular forces (i.e., the Viet Minh guerrillas); and a guarantee of the agreements by "the States participating in the Geneva Conference."

b. JCS Study French Proposals

Once more, the Chiefs, in reviewing the proposals, fell back on the Korean experience, which they said demonstrated the certainty that the communists would violate any armistice controls, including those supervised by an international body. An agreement to refrain from new military activities during armistice negotiations would be a strong obstacle to communist violations; but the communists, the JCS concluded, would never agree to such an arrangement. The Chiefs therefore urged that the U.S. not get trapped into backing a French armistice proposal that then could be taken up by the communists and exploited to bind us to a cease-fire. The only way to get satisfactory results was through military success, and since the Navarre Plan was no longer tenable, the next best alternative was not to associate the U.S. with any cease-fire in advance of a satisfactory political settlement. The first step, the Chiefs believed, should be the conclusion of a settlement that would "reasonably assure the political and territorial integrity of the Associated States..."; only thereafter should a cease-fire be entertained. 9/

c. Eisenhower Suggests Possibility of United Action

As previously, the Joint Chiefs' position became U.S. policy, in this case with only minor emendations. The President, reviewing the



JCS paper, agreed that the U.S. could not back the French proposal with its call for a supervised cease-fire that the communists would never respect. Eisenhower further concurred with the Chiefs' insistence on priority to a political settlement, with the stipulation that French forces continue fighting while negotiations were in progress. He added that the U.S. would continue aiding the French during that period and would, in addition, work toward a united action coalition "for the purpose of preventing further expansion of communist power in Southeast Asia." 10/

d. NSC Recommends Continued Study of United Action

These statements of position paved the way for a National Security Council meeting May 8 which set forth the guidelines of U.S. policy on negotiations for the delegation at Geneva. The decision taken at the meeting simply underscored what the President and the Chiefs had already stated:

"The United States will not associate itself with any proposal from any source directed toward a cease-fire in advance of an acceptable armistice agreement, including international controls. The United States could concur in the initiation of negotiations for such an armistice agreement. During the course of such negotiations, the French and the Associated States should continue to oppose the forces of the Viet Minh with all the means at their disposal. In the meantime, as a means of strengthening the hands of the French and the Associated States during the course of such negotiations, the United States will continue its program of aid and its efforts to organize and promptly activate a Southeast Asian regional grouping for the purpose of preventing further expansion of Communist power in Southeast Asia." 11/ )

e. U.S. to Be an "Interested Nation," Not a Negotiator

Before receiving detailed instructions from Dulles, Smith spoke twice at the first round of plenary sessions, once on May 10 (the second plenary) and again on May 12 (at the third). At these sessions, Smith brought home two major points of U.S. policy: first, he declined to commit the U.S. in advance to a guarantee of the settlement, despite Bidault's call for all the participants to make such a guarantee; 12/ second, he proposed that national elections in Vietnam be supervised by an international commission "under United Nations auspices." Smith stressed that the UN should have two separate functions -- overseeing not only the cease-fire but the elections as well. Both these points in Smith's speech were to remain cardinal elements of U.S. policy throughout the negotiations. 13/ On 12 May Smith received instructions clearly designed to make the U.S. an influential, but unentangled and

unobligated, participant. The U.S., Dulles cabled him, was to be "an interested nation which, however, is neither a belligerent nor a principal in the negotiation." Its primary aim would be to:

"...help the nations of that area [Indochina] peacefully to enjoy territorial integrity and political independence under stable and free governments with the opportunity to expand their economies, to realize their legitimate national aspirations, and to develop security through individual and collective defense against aggression, from within and without. This implies that these people should not be amalgamated into the Communist bloc of imperialistic dictatorship."

Accordingly, Smith was told, the U.S. should not give its approval to any settlement or cease-fire.

"...which would have the effect of subverting the existing lawful governments of the three aforementioned states or of permanently impairing their territorial integrity or of placing in jeopardy the forces of the French Union of Indochina, or which otherwise contravened the principles stated...above." 14/

f. U.S. Takes Hard Line for Geneva

The NSC decision of May 8, Smith's comments at the second and third plenary sessions, and Dulles' instructions to Smith reveal the hardness of the U.S. position on a Geneva settlement. The U.S. would not associate itself with any arrangement that failed to provide adequately for an internationally supervised cease-fire and national elections that resulted in the partitioning of any of the Associated States; or that compromised the independence and territorial integrity of those States in any way. Smith was left free, in fact, to withdraw from the conference or to restrict the American role to that of observer. 15/

g. French Military Situation Deteriorates

The pessimistic American view of the conference was founded also on the deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military effort, particularly in the Tonkin Delta. After the debacle at Dien Bien Phu, the French gradually shifted their forces from Laos and Cambodia into the Delta; but the Viet Minh naturally did likewise, moving several battalions eastward. U.S. Army intelligence reported on May 26, on the basis of French reports, that the Viet Minh were redeploying much faster than anticipated, to the point where only 2,000 of 35,000 troops originally in northwestern Tonkin remained. To thwart the communist military threat, General Ely told General Trapnell (on May 30) that French forces were forming a new defensive perimeter along the Hanoi-Haiphong axis; but Ely



III. A. 2.

U.S. AND FRENCH ON UNITED ACTION, MAY-MID JUNE 1954

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### III. A. 2. U.S. AND FRENCH ON UNITED ACTION, MAY-MID JUNE 1954

#### 1. U.S. Attempts to Reach Agreement with France on United Action

##### a. United Action Stressed as an Option

The formulation of an American approach to negotiations was paralleled by a search for an appropriate military alternative. Perceiving the inevitable bogging down of talks at Geneva as the consequence of communist procrastination, but also mindful of the bankruptcy of the Navarre Plan, the Administration still hoped that "united action" could be achieved once Britain and France realized, as we had consistently tried to convince them, that negotiating with the communists was a wasteful exercise. But in keeping open the option of united action, the Administration, during May and the first half of June, as in April, carefully conditioned it on a range of French concessions and promises. Thus, this second go-round of united action was not designed to make further negotiations impossible; rather, it was intended to provide an alternative which the French might utilize once negotiations were conceded by them to be useless.

##### b. French Request U.S. Terms for Intervention

The issue of united action arose again in early May when Premier Laniel, in a talk with Ambassador Dillon, expressed the view that the Chinese were the real masters of the negotiations at Geneva. This being the case, Laniel reasoned, the Chinese would probably seek to drag out the talks over any number of peripheral issues while the Viet Minh pushed on for a military decision. Readjustment of the French position in the field, with a major withdrawal on the order of 15 battalions to the Tonkin Delta, was probable very soon, Laniel said, unless the U.S. decided to give its active military cooperation. In the interim, the Premier requested that a U.S. general be dispatched to Paris to assist in military planning. 1/

##### c. U.S. States Intervention Terms

Laniel's views failed to make an impression in Washington. Although the Administration agreed to dispatch a general (Trapnell), Dulles proposed, and Eisenhower accepted, a series of "indispensable" conditions to American involvement which would have to be met by Paris; 2/

(1) A formal request for U.S. involvement from France and the Associated States; similar invitations to other nations;

(2) An immediate, favorable response to those invitations from Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the assurance that Britain "would either participate or be acquiescent";

(3) Presentation of "some aspect of matter" to the UN by one of the involved Asian states;

(4) A French guarantee of complete independence to the Associated States, "including unqualified option to withdraw from French Union at any time...";

(5) A French undertaking not to withdraw the Expeditionary Corps from Indochina during the period of united action in order to ensure that the U.S. would be providing air and sea, but not combat troop, support;

(6) Franco-American agreement on the training of native forces and a new command structure during united action (Admiral Radford was reported to be thinking in terms of a French supreme command with a U.S. air command);

(7) Full endorsement by the French cabinet and Assembly of these conditions to ensure a firm French commitment even in the event of a change in government in Paris.

It was further agreed that in the course of united action, the U.S. would pursue efforts to broaden the coalition and to formalize it as a regional defense pact.

#### d. Eisenhower Still Favors United Action

Eisenhower was still insistent on collective action, but recognized that the British might not commit themselves initially and that the Australians, facing a general election later in May, could only give "evidence" of their willingness to participate. A second major problem was Indochinese independence. Dulles posed the American dilemma on this score: on the one hand, the U.S. had to avoid giving Asia reason to believe we were intervening on behalf of colonialism; on the other, the Associated States lacked the personnel and leadership necessary to carrying on alone. "In a sense," said Dulles, "if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured." His solution was that the Associated States be granted (evidently, orally) the right to withdraw from the French Union after passage of a suitable time period, perhaps five or ten years. A final point concerned Executive-Congressional relations once a French request, backed by Parliamentary assent, reached Washington. The President felt he should appear before a joint session of Congress and seek a Congressional resolution to use the armed forces in Indochina. At Eisenhower's request, Dulles directed that State Department begin working up a first draft of such a Presidential message. 3/



e. The French Reject Independence Options for Associated States

The American response to Laniel's requests set the stage for an extended series of discussions over the ensuing five weeks. In Paris, Dillon communicated the American conditions to Laniel, who accepted the conditions, but with important reservations. First, Laniel indicated his dismay at the U.S. insistence on the right of the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union. The Premier commented that the French public could never accept this condition inasmuch as the Associated States had themselves never made it and since even the Viet Minh envisioned joining the Union. Second, the obvious U.S. reluctance to go beyond air and naval forces disturbed the Premier. He requested that the U.S. provide, in addition, artillery forces and token ground troops. Moreover, he indicated pleasure that UK participation was no longer a prerequisite to American involvement.

f. Laniel Presents Two Additional Questions to U.S.

Laniel's qualified approval of the preconditions was accompanied by a request for a U.S. response to two other questions: (1) Could the U.S. in some way guarantee the borders and independence of Laos and Cambodia following a French withdrawal from those countries? (2) Could the U.S. provide written assurance of prompt air intervention to meet a Chinese Communist air attack on French forces in the delta? 4/

g. The U.S. Replies

The American response to Laniel's demurrers and requests was for the most part negative. On the French-Associated States relationship, which Ambassador Dillon had commented was the chief barrier to a French request for intervention, 5/ Dulles replied (through Dillon) that the U.S. might have some flexibility on the matter, but had to remain adamant on complete independence if we ever hoped to gain Thai and Filipino support. Next, on the question of the extent of U.S. involvement, the U.S. was more amenable: we would not exclude anti-aircraft "and limited U.S. ground forces for protection of bases which might be used by U.S. naval and air forces." As for Laniel's specific requests, Washington answered that it saw no way, in view of the military and legal impracticalities, to guarantee the security of Laos and Cambodia; the alternative was that Laos and Cambodia join with Thailand in seeking a UN Peace Observation Commission (POC) on their territories. On the possibility of Chinese MIG intervention, considered extremely remote by the Defense Department, the French were to be assured that a collective defense arrangement would include protection against that contingency. 6/

h. Other Concerned Western Nations are Kept Informed

During the U.S.-French give-and-take, the British were clearly being kept at arm's length, no longer considered essential to the beginning of a united action. This irked London considerably,

especially as the Washington-Paris exchanges were making headlines despite efforts to keep them under wraps. It was only because of the stories and British annoyance that Dulles directed that the British, Australian, and New Zealand ambassadors be informed "in general terms" regarding U.S.-French talks. 7/

## 2. Agreement with France Appears Increasingly Unlikely

### a. U.S. Begins Contingency Planning

Although the setting up of several U.S. preconditions to involvement and the qualifications of the French reply by no means made intervention an immediate possibility, the U.S., apparently for the first time, moved ahead on contingency planning. The State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took the lead by producing a hypothetical timetable based on the assumption of U.S.-French agreement in principle to the proposed conditions by 21 May. 8/ FEA also outlined a full slate of urgent priority studies to be undertaken by various Government agencies, including U.S. strategy under differing circumstances of Chinese involvement in the war. 9/ By 24 May, FEA had forwarded a contingency study of the Operations Planning Board which proposed, among other things, U.S. public and private communications to Peking to prevent, or at least reduce the effectiveness of, direct Chinese intervention. 10/

### b. Three Regional Pacts Considered

The initiation of planning for U.S. intervention extended to more far-ranging discussions of the purposes, requirements, and make-up of a Southeast Asia collective defense organization. The framework of the discussions evidenced the Government's intention that united action only be undertaken after the Geneva conference had reached a stalemate or, far less likely, a settlement. Three regional formulations were envisaged: the first would be designed for direct action, probably without British participation, either to defeat the Viet Minh or exclude them from gaining control of Indochina; the second, formed after a settlement, would comprise the present SEATO members and functions, in particular actual assistance to the participating Asian states against external attack or "Communist insurrection"; the third would have a broad Asian membership, with its function limited to social and economic cooperation. 11/

### c. JCS Point Out Key Planning Considerations

An important input to contingency planning on intervention came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 20 May, the JCS sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense entitled "U.S. Military Participation in Indochina." 12/ In the paper, the Chiefs requested formulation of a Defense Department position on the size of any U.S. contributions and the nature of the command structure once united action began. They noted the "limited availability of U.S. forces



for military action in Indochina" and the "current numerical advantage of the French Union forces over the enemy, i.e., approximately 5 to 3." Pointing out the disadvantages of either stationing large numbers of U.S. troops in Indochina or of basing U.S. aircraft on Indochina's limited facilities, the Chiefs considered "the current greatest need" to be an expanded, intensified training program for indigenous troops. The JCS observed, moreover, that they were guided in their comments by the likely reaction of the CPR to U.S. involvement, as well as by the prescription: "Atomic weapons will be used whenever it is to our military advantage."

d. JCS Urge Limited U.S. Commitment

In view of these problems and prospects, the JCS urged the limitation of U.S. involvement to strategic planning and the training of indigenous forces through an increase in MAAG to 2250 men. Our force commitment should be limited, they thought, primarily to air-naval support directed from outside Indochina; even here, the Chiefs cautioned against making a "substantial" air force commitment. The Chiefs were also mindful of the Chinese. Since Viet Minh supplies came mainly from China, "the destruction or neutralization of those outside sources supporting the Viet Minh would materially reduce the French military problems in Indochina." The Chiefs were clearly taking the position that any major U.S. force commitment in the Far East should be reserved for a war against the Chinese. Recognizing the limitations of the U.S. defense establishment for large-scale involvement in so-called "brush-fire" wars, the Chiefs were extremely hesitant, as had consistently been the case, to favor action along the periphery of China when the strategic advantages of U.S. power lay in decisive blows against the major enemy. Thus, the JCS closed their memorandum with the admonition that air-naval commitments beyond those specified

"...will involve maldeployment of forces and reduce readiness to meet probable Chinese Communist reaction elsewhere in the Far East. From the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces to that area would be a serious diversion of limited U.S. capabilities." 13/

e. JCS Call for Meeting of Interested Western Powers

The JCS evidently also decided that it would be a good idea to gather together military representatives of the U.S., France, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. At first, the Chiefs suggested the downgrading of the representatives to below chief-of-staff level; but apparently on the strong protest of Under Secretary Smith at Geneva, 14/ and of the British too, 15/ the Chiefs acquiesced in a meeting at chief-of-staff level. But prior to the meeting, which began the first week of June, important developments occurred in the U.S.-France go-'round on intervention.



f. U.S. Again Requests Independence for Associated States

The ticklish problem of bringing France to concede the vitalness of granting full independence to the Associated States occupied center stage once more. On 27 May, the State Department, acknowledging France's hesitancy to go too far on this score, still insisted on certain "minimum measures," the most important of which was that France announce, during or immediately after the signing of the latest draft treaties, 16/ that she would willingly withdraw all her forces from Indochina unless invited by the governments of the Associated States to maintain them or to establish bases. The U.S., the Department added, would be prepared to make a similar declaration if it committed forces. Beyond that step, the French were also asked to permit Indochinese participation in the programming of economic aid, and their direct receipt of all military aid; to find ways to broaden participation of the Vietnamese defense ministry and armed forces in national defense; and to push for the establishment of "representative and authentic nationalist governments" at the earliest possible date. 17/

g. French Response is Encouraging

The French responded with surprising affirmativeness to these proposals. Dillon was able to report from Paris on 29 May, following a conversation with Laniel, that the two perhaps "had now reached accord in principle on political side." Laniel, he reported, urged immediate military talks to complete arrangements on training of the Vietnamese, a new command structure, and war plans. 18/ Inasmuch as Ely and O'Daniel in Indochina had reached general agreements on American assumption of responsibility for training the VNA, the way was apparently cleared for bilateral military talks in Washington to take place simultaneously with, and therefore disguised by, the five-power staff negotiations. 19/

h. Question of Chinese Air Attack Again Arises

Dillon's optimism was cut short rather quickly. When he reported on talks with Schumann, Dillon had added Schumann's and Pleven's concern about Chinese air intervention, which they felt would be so damaging as to warrant a deterrent action in the form of a Presidential request to the Congress for discretionary authority to defend the Delta in case of CCAF attack. The French wanted a virtually instantaneous U.S. response, which would be assured by a Presidential request before, rather than after, overt Chinese aerial intervention. 20/ The State Department's retort was that the French first had to satisfy the previously reported conditions before any such move by the President could be considered.

i. Dillon Outlines French Position

Dillon was no less disappointed by Washington's reply than the French. He cabled back that there apparently was an "extremely serious misunderstanding between U.S. and French": 21/



"French draw sharp distinction between (1) US intervention in present circumstances with Viet Minh bolstered by Chinese Communist materiel, technicians and possibly scattered troops and (2) US reaction against full-scale air attack mounted from Communist Chinese bases."

Dillon said that, for the French, the U.S. preconditions applied in the first case but not the second, wherein only Congressional authorization was understood to stand in the way of direct U.S. action. Ely, the Ambassador reported, had all along believed he had Radford's personal assurance of an American reaction to Chinese air attack in the Delta. Now, the French wanted to know if they could count on instant U.S. interdiction of a CCAF strike. The Ambassador closed by reminding the Department of the incalculable harm to NATO, to the whole U.S. position in Western Europe, and to the U.S. position against communist worldwide strategy if a Chinese attack were not met. 22/

j. U.S. Repeats Initial Reply

Despite Dillon's protestations, the Department stuck by its initial position of May 15, namely, that Chinese air attack was unlikely and that the U.S. would meet that problem when it arose. 23/ Clearly, the U.S. was unwilling to make any advance commitments which the French could seize upon for political advantage without having to give a quid pro quo in their Indochina policy. Eisenhower affirmed this view and went beyond it: the conditions for united action, he said, applied equally to Chinese direct and indirect involvement in Indochina. The U.S. would make no unilateral commitment against any contingency, including overt, unprovoked Chinese aggression, without firm broad allied support. 24/

k. Other Obstacles to U.S.-French Accord

There were other obstacles to U.S.-French agreement, as brought into the open with a memorandum to the President from Foreign Minister Bidault on June 1. 25/ One was American insistence on French Assembly approval of a government request for U.S. intervention. The French cabinet considered that to present a program of Allied involvement to the Assembly except under the circumstance of "a complete failure of the Geneva Conference" attributable to the communists "would be literally to wish to overthrow the [French] Government." A second area of continuing disagreement concerned the maintenance of French forces in the field and the nature of a U.S. commitment. The French held that the U.S. could bypass Congress by committing perhaps one division of Marines without a declaration of war. 26/ Although assured that the Marines, being part of the Navy, would be included in a U.S. air-naval commitment, the French wanted much more.

### 1. The Continuing Issue of Independence for Associated States

A final, but by no means negligible, French objection to the U.S. proposals was the independence issue. Far from having been settled, as Dillon supposed, the French were still unhappy about American pressure for concessions even after the State Department's May 27 revisions. The French were particularly disturbed (as Bidault implied) at the notion that the Associated States could leave the Union at any time, even while French fighting men were in the field on Indochina's behalf. France was perfectly willing, Bidault remarked, to sign new treaties of association with the three Indochinese States, to allow them a larger voice in defense matters, and to work with them toward formation of truly national governments; but, to judge from his commentary, Paris would not go the whole route by committing itself in advance to Indochina's full freedom of action. And while this and other issues remained unresolved, as Dulles observed on June 4, Laniel's reported belief that the U.S. and France were politically agreed was, to Washington, a "serious overstatement." 27/

### 3. United Action Option Withdrawn

#### a. Issues Begin to Lose Relevance in a Changing War

Early in June, the unsettled issues separating the U.S. from France began to lose their relevance to the war. Even if they could be resolved, it was questionable whether U.S. involvement could any longer be useful or decisive. Thus, on the matter of training the VNA, we were no longer certain that time would permit our training methods to take effect even if the French promptly removed themselves from responsibility in that area. State Department opinion now held that the Vietnam situation had deteriorated "to point where any commitment at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitment. Our position accordingly is that we do not wish to consider U.S. training mission or program separately from over-all operational plan on assumption conditions fulfilled for U.S. participation war Indochina." 28/

Simply put, the Department had determined that the grave but still retrievable military situation prevailing at the time united action was proposed and pursued had, in June, altered radically. Morale of the Franco-Vietnamese forces had dropped sharply, the whole Tonkin Delta was endangered, and the political situation in Saigon was dangerously unstable. 29/ Faced with this uniformly black picture, the Administration moved to withdraw united action from consideration by the French.

#### b. Dulles Considers Withdrawing Option of United Action

By mid-June, American diplomacy was in an unenviable position. At Geneva, very little progress had been made of a kind



that could lead any of the Allies to expect a satisfactory outcome. Yet, the alternative which the U.S. had kept open no longer seemed viable either. As Dulles told Smith, any "final agreement" with the French would be "quite impossible," for Paris was moving farther than ever from a determination that united action was necessary. "They want, and in effect have, an option on our intervention," Dulles wrote, "but they do not want to exercise it and the date of expiry of our option is fast running out." 30/ From Paris, in fact, Ambassador Dillon urged the Secretary that "the time limit be now" on U.S. intervention." 31/ And Dulles was fast concluding that Dillon was correct.

c. Dulles Withdraws Option

In view of France's feeling that, because of strong Assembly pressure for a settlement, no request could be made of the U.S. until every effort to reach agreement at Geneva had been exhausted, 32/ Dulles in effect decided on 15 June that united action was no longer tenable. In a conversation with Bonnet, in which the Ambassador read a message from Bidault which indicated that the French no longer considered the U.S. bound to intervention on satisfaction of the seven conditions, the Secretary again put forth the difficulty of the American position. He stated that the U.S. stood willing to respond to a French request under the conditions of 11 May, but that time and circumstance might make future U.S. intervention "impracticable or so burdensome as to be out of proportion to the results obtainable." While this standpoint would be unsatisfactory to Bidault, especially in his dealings with the communists at Geneva, Dulles "could not conceive that it would be expected that the U.S. would give a third power the option to put it into war at times and under conditions wholly of the other's choosing." 33/ United action was, then, not removed from consideration at a later date; but it was shelved, and it never appeared again in the form and with the purpose originally proposed.

d. U.S. Turns to Studies with U.K. on Intervention

During this period of a gradual "break" with France on united action, the alternative for the United States became a collective defense arrangement with British participation. Once again, U.S. hopes shifted to London, particularly when Eden, on 9 June, told Smith of his extreme pessimism over the course of the negotiations. Smith drew from the conversation the strong impression that Eden believed negotiations to have failed and would now follow the U.S. lead on a coalition to guarantee Cambodia and Laos "under umbrella of some UN action" (Smith's words). Whether the U.S. and U.K. would act prior to or after a likely settlement at Geneva by the desperate French became the major area of inquiry. 34/

e. United Action Option Has Come Full Cycle

The rebirth and demise of united action was a rare case of history repeated almost immediately after it had been made. The

United States, having failed to interest Britain in united action prior to the start of the Geneva Conference, determined to plunge ahead without British participation as a sine qua non. But, the caveat to the French grew in importance. Conditions which had been given the French before the fall of Dien Bien Phu were now augmented, most importantly by a greater detailing of the process the French government would have to go through before the U.S. would consider intervention.

#### 4. French Use Threat of U.S. Intervention at Geneva

##### a. French Do Not Intend to Request U.S. Involvement

Even while the French pondered the conditions, urged their refinement and redefinition to suit French policies, and insisted in the end that they saw no political obstacles separating the U.S. and France, Washington foresaw that the French were very unlikely to forward a request for U.S. involvement. Having learned something from the futile diplomatic bargaining in April, Department of State representatives in Paris and Washington saw that what the French wanted was not the military but the political benefits of U.S. involvement; and they thought they could get them by bringing into the open the fact that the U.S. and France were negotiating active American participation in the fighting. Thus, Dillon correctly assessed in mid-May that French inquiries about U.S. conditions for intervention represented a "wish to use possibility of our intervention primarily to strengthen their hand at Geneva." 35/ Dillon's sensitivity to the French position was proven accurate by Bidault's memorandum to the President: France would, in reality, only call on the United States if an "honorable" settlement could clearly not be obtained at Geneva, for only under that circumstance could the National Assembly be persuaded that the Laniel government had done everything possible to achieve peace.

##### b. French Bring Out Possible U.S. United Action as a Lever in Bargaining

Our recognition of the game the French were playing did not keep us from posing intervention as an alternative for them; but by adhering tenaciously to the seven conditions, the U.S. ruled out either precipitous American action or an open-ended commitment to be used or rejected by Paris. "We cannot grant French an indefinite option on us without regard to intervening deterioration" of the military situation, Dulles wrote 8 June. 36/ As much as the Administration wanted to avoid a sell-out at Geneva, it was aware that events in Indochina might preclude effective action even if the French suddenly decided they wanted U.S. support.

##### c. United Action is an Alternative But Not a Subverting Force

The United States, then, did not propose united action with the intention of subverting the Conference. Instead, united action was offered as a palliative if the Conference should become an exercise



in futility for the Western side. Washington clearly hoped that France would find it could not gain an "honorable settlement" through talks with the Viet Minh, and that the British could admit to having been unrealistic in postponing a commitment to united action pending the outcome of talks. In short, the U.S. predicted and welcomed the Conference's "subversion" through communist intransigence; yet when, in mid-June, the Conference began to break for what would be a lengthy recess, Washington had to conclude that united action was no longer appropriate to military circumstances in Indochina, nor feasible given U.S. insistence on intervention only under conditions conducive to a decisive success. By the end of June, therefore, the pattern of U.S. diplomacy shifted -- from united action in Indochina to collective defense in Southeast Asia, and from disenchantment with the Geneva Conference to attempts to influence a settlement at least basically in keeping with our interests.

III. A. 3.

THE U.S. NEGOTIATING POSITION DURING THE CONFERENCE

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### III. A. 3. THE U.S. NEGOTIATING POSITION DURING THE CONFERENCE

#### 1. Threat of United Action Influences Negotiations

##### a. United Action is Allowed to Remain a Public Option

Between mid-June and the end of the Conference on 21 July, U.S. diplomacy worked at unifying the Western alliance behind a Southeast Asia defense pact and at coalescing a united Western diplomatic front at Geneva so as to obtain the best possible settlement. In this process, the Western alliance gradually cohered. The result was that Anglo-French cooperation was gained not only for the concept of a regional security pact, but also for a firm negotiating position vis-à-vis the communists. Additionally, although the U.S. private position was, by late June, to abide by a settlement which partitioned Vietnam and provided for "the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means" (under the U.S.-U.K. seven-point memorandum of 29 June, our public posture at the Conference left unclear to the communists just what terms would in fact be acceptable to us. For our part, united action was a dead issue by mid-June; but the communist negotiators could not have known this. As a result, they may well have been influenced toward a settlement by the belief that further prolongation of talks would only reinforce Western unity, perhaps coalesce a united response in Indochina previously unobtainable by the U.S., and very likely bring the three Indochinese states into the proposed American security treaty.

##### b. France and U.K. Exploit U.S. Threat

Both the French and the British negotiators made excellent use of America's ambivalent status. The Chief French delegate, Jean Chauvel, told a Russian delegate, Kuznetsov, for instance, that France's proposed division of Vietnam at the 18th parallel would probably be more acceptable to the other conferees than the unreasonable Viet Minh demand for the 13th parallel. Chauvel added that a settlement along the French line would thereby avert the risk of an internationalization of the conflict. 1/ Eden also used the implied threat of U.S. involvement. During late May, he warned Chou "again" of the dangers inherent in the Indochina situation, which could lead to unpredictable and serious results. When Chou said he was counting on Britain to prevent this from happening, the Foreign Secretary replied Chou was mistaken, since Britain would stand by the U.S. in a showdown. 2/ And Bidault and Smith, in mid-June, agreed that in view of genuine Sino-Soviet desire to keep the Conference going, Chinese concern over U.S. bases in Laos and Cambodia should not be dispelled. 3/

##### c. Eden Viewed as Moderating U.S. Threat

The British seem to have played a particularly vital role in exploiting ambiguous American intentions for diplomatic gain. At the Conference, Eden was in close contact with Molotov and Chou, and evidently



earned their confidence and respect. He was clearly viewed as a moderating element who could be counted on (as Chou put it) to influence the U.S. away from rash actions such as might subvert the Conference. Eden's conduct, therefore, served as a barometer to the Communists of the prospects for Western agreement to a settlement. When the British agreed to participate in five-power military staff talks in Washington (3-9 June), and when Eden and Churchill flew to Washington in late June for talks with Dulles and Eisenhower, the communists may have believed that the U.K. was undergoing some kind of reassessment of its attitude toward U.S. proposals for a Southeast Asia coalition. The implicit warning of U.K. participation in a "united action" approach which it had previously rebuffed, whether or not the actual intention of the British leaders, could not have been missed in Moscow and Peking.

## 2. U.S. Pushes for a Regional Pact

### a. Communists Appear Intransigent

By mid-June there seemed to be little reason to expect that the Geneva Conference, even if it reconvened in July, would see any significant breakthroughs from the communist side. Inasmuch as the French had decided, under a new government committed to a settlement by 20 July, to continue their "underground" military discussions with the Viet Minh, U.S. diplomatic efforts concentrated on pushing the British to agree to a treaty system for Southeast Asia that would, in effect, guarantee the security of those areas left in non-communist hands following a settlement. On 14 June, Dulles observed that events at Geneva apparently had "been such as to satisfy the British insistence that they did not want to discuss collective action until either Geneva was over or at least the results of Geneva were known." Dulles assumed that the departure of Eden was "evidence that there was no adequate reason for further delaying collective talks on Southeast Asia defense." 4/

### b. French Increasingly Interested in Partition

While plans were being laid to press ahead with a regional coalition, important developments occurred at the Conference. Partition, which the communist side had introduced in late May as a compromise formula, was being given serious attention by the French. Informed of this by Smith, Dulles reiterated the view that the U.S. could not possibly associate itself with a sell-out of the Delta any more than we could be expected (as Jean Chauvel had urged) to "sell" partition to the non-communist Vietnamese. 5/

### c. Two New Factors Enhance Partition

Two qualifications to the partition concept cropped up in the same period. A five-power military staff conference in Washington (U.S., U.K., France, Australia, and New Zealand) had ended 9 June with

a report that considered the Thakhek-Dong Hoi line (midway between the 17th and 18th parallels) defensible in the event Vietnam were partitioned. 6/ Moreover, Chauvel had told U. Alexis Johnson, then a member of the American delegation, that French flirtation with the idea of one or more enclaves for each side in the northern and southern zones of divided Vietnam had been abandoned. Chauvel indicated his government had decided it would rather give up Haiphong than accept a Viet Minh enclave in the south if the choice came to that. 7/ The conference report and the Paris change of heart on the enclave concept had the effect of convincing some that if partition were adopted, it could provide for a solid, militarily defensible South Vietnam.

d. Communist Concessions Show More Promise

In another area, the communists had conceded -- with Chou En-lai's proposal at a restricted Conference session of 16 June -- that Laos and Cambodia were problems distinct from that in Vietnam. And in a conversation with Smith, Molotov added his conviction that Pham Van Dong already had evidenced his willingness to withdraw Viet Minh "volunteers" from Laos and Cambodia. 8/ But, here as with partition, communist initiatives only satisfied in small part the American conception of acceptable terms. Until regular Viet Minh forces were entirely removed from Laos and Cambodia, until their puppet Free Khmer and Pathet Lao elements were disarmed or withdrawn, and until the right of the royal governments to seek outside support for self-defense was confirmed, the U.S. saw little progress in Chou's statement.

e. U.S. Remains Pessimistic

The gloom in American circles thickened considerably in late June. Continued irresolution at the conference table, together with the strong feeling in Washington that the French delegation, now responsible to Premier Mendès-France (as of 18 June), would conclude a settlement as soon as the Conference reconvened, led Dulles to caution Smith against becoming involved in committee work (as the French proposed) that would appear to link the U.S. to any final decisions. "Our thinking at present," Dulles cabled Smith on 24 June, "is that our role at Geneva should soon be restricted to that of observer . . . ." 9/

3. U.S. Attempts to Unify Western Diplomatic Position

a. French Request Statements of U.S. and U.K. Support

While the U.S. wanted to cut back on its involvement in the Conference proceedings, the French hoped to obtain, as previously, sufficient U.S. support to bolster their negotiating position in the face of communist pressure. Thus, on 26 June, Henri Bonnet delivered an aide-memoire from his government to Dulles and Eden, noting the difficulties



of the French position. The French wanted to "assure the State of Vietnam a territory as solid as possible," but the Viet Minh were unlikely to make concessions in the Tonkin Delta, and the Vietnamese in Saigon were likely to object violently to a partition arrangement. The French government, therefore, hoped that the U.S. could find a way to assist it in both directions: first, the U.S. and U.K. might issue a declaration following their upcoming talks in Washington that would "state in some fashion or other that, if it is not possible to reach a reasonable settlement at the Geneva Conference, a serious aggravation of international relations would result"; second, the U.S. might intercede with the Vietnamese to counsel them against opposing a settlement really in their best interests. 10/

b. U.S. and U.K. Issue Joint Statement

The second suggestion was never given serious consideration, for the U.S. did not wish to be tied to a settlement that would cede territory to the Viet Minh. The first, however, was acted upon when Churchill and Eden arrived in Washington on 24 June. Four days later, the U.S. and U.K. issued a joint statement which warned: "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated." 11/

c. U.S. and U.K. Formulate "Seven Points" Agreement

Of more immediate consequence for the course of the negotiations was the unpublicized agreement between the two countries on a set of principles which, if worked into the settlement terms, would enable London and Washington to "respect" the armistice. The principles, known subsequently as the seven points, were communicated to the French. They were: 12/

(1) Preservation of the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia, and assurance of Viet Minh withdrawal from those countries;

(2) Preservation of at least the southern half of Vietnam, and if possible an enclave in the Tonkin Delta, with the line of demarcation no further south than one running generally west from Dong Hoi;

(3) No restrictions on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam "materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers";

(4) No "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control";

(5) No provision that would "exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means";

(6) Provision for "the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam";

(7) Provision for "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement."

d. British Adherence to Seven Points Remains Doubtful

Although agreement to the seven points represented something of an American diplomatic victory (with the important exception of point 2, where the U.S. for the first time conceded that partition was inescapable), the U.S. was by no means confident that the British would actually abide by the relatively hard bargaining lines set forth. ". . . we have the distinct impression," Dulles wrote, "that the British look upon this [memorandum of the seven points] merely as an optimum solution and that they would not encourage the French to hold out for a solution as good as this." The Secretary observed that the British, during the talks, had settled for agreement to "respect" the final terms; they preferred something stronger, and in fact "wanted to express these 7 points merely as a 'hope' without any indication of firmness on our part." The U.S., quite aside from what was said in the seven points, "would not want to be associated in any way with a settlement which fell materially short of the 7 point memorandum." <sup>13/</sup> The possibility of a unilateral withdrawal was still being "given consideration," Dulles reported, <sup>14/</sup> even as the seven points were agreed upon.

e. French Generally Concur with Seven Points

Despite reservations about the feasibility of implementing the seven points, the U.S. hoped to get French approval of them. On 6 July Dillon telegraphed the French reaction as given him by Parodi, the Secretary-General of the cabinet. With the exception of point 5 dealing with elections, the French were in agreement. They were confused about an apparent conflict between the elections provision and point 4, under which political provisions, which would include elections, were not to risk loss of retained Vietnam. In addition, they felt U.S. intention merely to "respect" any agreement was too weak a term, and requested clarification of its meaning. <sup>15/</sup>

Dulles responded the next day to both matters. Points 4 and 5 were not in conflict, he said. It was quite possible that an agreement in line with the seven points might still not prevent Indochina from going communist. The important thing, therefore, was to arrange for national elections in a way that would give the South Vietnamese a



liberal breathing spell:

"... since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements in South Vietnam best chance."

And so far as "respect" of that agreement was concerned, the U.S. and U.K. meant they

"would not oppose a settlement which conformed to seven points . . . . It does not of course mean we would guarantee much settlement or that we would necessarily support it publicly. We consider 'respect' as strong a word as we can possibly employ in the circumstances . . . . 'Respect' would also mean that we would not seek directly or indirectly to upset settlement by force." 16/

#### 4. U.S. Representation at Geneva Influences Favorable Outcome

##### a. French Request High-Level U.S. Representation

The seven points, Dulles' clarification of the U.S. position on elections in Vietnam, and his delimitation of the U.S. obligation towards a settlement were for the most part satisfactory to the French. But to Paris, the firm American position, to be influential at the Conference, had to be supplemented by high-level representation. Otherwise, Mendès-France argued, the French could not present a strong front when Molotov and Chou resumed their places in the coming weeks. Answering U.S. doubts, Mendès-France averred that the French bargaining position was precisely in line with the seven points and would not deviate substantially from them. With great feeling, he told a member of the U.S. Embassy in Paris that the presence of either the Secretary or the Under Secretary was "absolutely essential and necessary." 17/

##### b. Dulles Objects to High-Level U.S. Representative

The U.S. remained opposed to any proposal that implied acceptance of the final terms. While recognizing Mendès-France's difficulties in carrying on almost alone, Dulles firmly believed the French would end by accepting a settlement unsatisfactory to the U.S. -- whether or not the U.S. delegation was upgraded. 18/ Moreover, were the U.S. to send Smith or Dulles back to Geneva only to find the French compelled to negotiate an unacceptable agreement, Washington would be required to dissociate itself in a manner "which would be deeply resented by the French as an effort on our part to block at the last minute a

peace which they ardently desire," possibly with "irreparable injury to Franco-American relations . . . ." 19/

c. Dulles Lists Objections

On 10 July these objections to Mendès-France's pleadings were forcefully raised in a direct message to the French Premier from the Secretary. Dulles stated that the presence of high-ranking Western Big Three delegates at Geneva would be no "substitute for a clear agreement on a joint position which includes agreement as to what will happen if that position is not accepted by the Communists." Denying that a true united front existed even with the seven-point memorandum, Dulles went on to say that the seven points seemed to be "merely an optimum solution" not only for the British, but equally for the French. He cited French willingness to permit communist forces to remain in northern Laos, to accept a demarcation line "considerably south of Donghoi," to neutralize and demilitarize Laos and Cambodia, and to permit "elections so early and so ill-prepared and ill-supervised as to risk the loss of the entire area to Communism . . . ." These, said Dulles, were illustrative of a "whittling-away process" which, cumulatively, could destroy the intent of the seven points.

Thus, believing that the French had already gone far toward nullifying some of the major provisions of the U.S.-U.K. memorandum, Dulles reiterated the long-standing position that the U.S. had the right "not to endorse a solution which would seem to us to impair seriously certain principles which the U.S. believes must, as far as it is concerned, be kept unimpaired, if our own struggle against Communism is to be successfully pursued." Dulles added that a U.S. position that created uncertainty in the minds of the enemy "might strengthen your hand more than our presence at Geneva . . . ." 20/

d. Dulles and Mendès-France Agree on the Seven Points

Mendès-France, in reply, stated that France would accept nothing unacceptable to the U.S. 21/ Apparently, this move had some effect on Dulles, for he flew to Paris for talks that resulted in a Franco-American endorsement of the U.S.-U.K. memorandum. 22/ In addition, Mendès-France and Dulles signed a position paper on the same day (14 July) that reiterated the U.S. position at the conference as "a friendly nation" whose role was subordinate to that of the primary non-communist parties, the Associated States and France. This paper went on to describe the seven points as those acceptable to the "primarily interested nations" and as those which the U.S. could "respect." However, should terms ultimately be concluded which differed markedly from the seven points, the U.S. would neither be asked nor expected to accept them, and "may publicly disassociate itself from such differing terms." Dulles further obtained from the French certain assurances



regarding coordinated action regardless of the outcome of the conference. The position paper declared America's intention "to seek, with other interested nations, a collective defense association designed to preserve, against direct and indirect aggression, the integrity of the non-communist areas of Southeast Asia following any settlement." 23/

e. France Continues Insistence on High-Level U.S. Representation

On all but one matter, the U.S. and France were now in complete accord on a negotiating strategy. That strategy, if adhered to, would not only prevent a sell-out to the communists, but also provide the framework for further allied discussions whether or not a settlement were concluded. The point of difference was Mendès-France's continued insistence that his delegation be supported by the presence of Dulles himself. Writing to Dulles of his understanding of the seven-point position paper just signed, the French Premier added:

"... In effect, I have every reason to think that your absence would be precisely interpreted as demonstrating, before the fact, that you disapproved of the conference and of everything which might be accomplished. Not only would those who are against us find therein the confirmation of the ill will which they attribute to your government concerning the re-establishment of peace in Indochina; but many others would read in it a sure sign of a division of the western powers." 24/

f. The U.S. Reconsiders French Request

For reasons not entirely clear, Mendès-France's appeal for high-level U.S. representation at Geneva was now favorably received in Washington. Dulles was able to inform Mendès-France on 14 July:

"In the light of what you say and after consultation with President Eisenhower, I am glad to be able to inform you that the President and I are asking the Undersecretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith, to prepare to return at his earliest convenience to Geneva to share in the work of the conference on the basis of the understanding which we have arrived at." 25/

For the first time since mid-1953, the U.S. and France were solidly joined in a common front on Indochina.

g. Bedell Smith Instructed Not to Commit the U.S.

On 16 July Smith received a new set of instructions based upon the U.S.-France seven-point agreement. After reiterating the

passive, formal role the U.S. was to play at the Conference, Dulles told the Under Secretary (1) that if a settlement should be reached he was to issue a unilateral (or, if possible, multilateral) statement that "conforms substantially" to the seven points; (2) that "The United States will not, however, become cosignatory with the Communists in any Declaration"; (3) that the U.S. should not be put in a position where it could be held responsible for guaranteeing the results of the Conference; (4) that Smith's efforts should be directed toward forwarding ideas to the "active negotiators" (France, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam); and (5) that the U.S. should avoid permitting the French to believe that a breakdown of the negotiations was due to U.S. advice or pressure, thus making the U.S. in some way morally obligated to intervene militarily in Indochina. Dulles stated with respect to this last point that the U.S. was "not prepared at the present time to give any commitment that it will intervene in the war if the Geneva Conference fails. . . ." 26/ This decision, of course, remained unknown to the communists at Geneva, who continued to speculate on U.S. intentions.

#### h. Smith's Presence Reinforces Western Position

Coming soon after the Dulles-Bidault talks in Paris (13-14 July), Smith's return was apparently interpreted by the Chinese, and doubtless by the Russians as well, as a sign of a united Western front at the Conference. 27/ When taken in conjunction with what Mendès-France had already publicly told the National Assembly of his intentions to ask for conscripts in the event his 20 July deadline passed without a settlement, and with what the Premier told Malenkov about not intending Geneva to "turn into a Panmunjom," 28/ the return of Smith gave the French negotiating position the appearance of real strength. The communist delegations, therefore, were presented with an option. They could call France's bluff -- by refusing further concessions or by making a settlement contingent on a U.S. guarantee 29/ -- or they could seek to gain French agreement that, hopefully, would obviate a U.S.-U.K.-French alignment in Asia. As the Conference ground on toward Mendès-France's 20 July deadline, major concessions from the communist side brought the settlement essentially in line with the seven points.



SUMMARY

One principal controversy over the Geneva Accords of 1954 stems from the view that Vietnam under the Bao Dai regime was actually still a French colony, and hence was obligated by the agreements reached by France at Geneva. Specifically, it is argued, Article 27 of the agreement signed by the French fixed responsibility for observance on the signatory governments "and their successors." The answer to the charge that the State of Vietnam thereby became a guarantor of the Accords is partly a matter of international law -- a contentious point of law, given the relatively new phenomenon of former colonial states assuming full sovereignty. But it is also a matter of fact and of declaratory policy. In fact, the GVN was an independent state before the Accords were signed, and was treated as a separate state throughout the conference. It signed nothing at Geneva. To the contrary, in its declarations it clearly repudiated the Accords, and declined to accept any responsibility for observing or enforcing them.

The GVN had been given full independence from France on 4 June 1954, and was accepted as an equal by the other governments at Geneva. Therefore, the GVN was not automatically obligated by the July agreements between the Viet Minh and France. From the beginning of the conference, the GVN interests clashed with French desires. The French wanted to end the Indochina fighting even if disengagement entailed serious concessions to the Viet Minh. Hard-line GVN counterproposals, running against the prevailing spirit of compromise, were rejected by both the communist powers and the West. The final wording of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities was drawn up as the French and the Viet Minh would have it. The U.S., intent on promoting some constructive outcome of the conference, offered little support to the GVN. The U.S. did refuse to act on France's behalf to pressure the GVN, and did urge the French to be more receptive to the GVN delegates. But since U.K. and French delegates were ready to make substantial accommodations with the communists to achieve a quick end to the fighting, and with little U.S. backing, the GVN negotiating position was foredoomed (Tab 1).

France, the dominant Western power in the disputed area, and the Viet Minh were the designated executors of the Accords. Neither the armistice agreement nor other aspects of the settlement were practicable without DRV and French compliance. The GVN delegates at Geneva were emphatic in their repeated refusal to accept GVN responsibility for accords signed by France, especially with reference to partition and elections. No precipitate withdrawal of French military and diplomatic power from Vietnam was foreseen, so that the Accords embodied the anomaly of ignoring the sovereign GVN, even with respect to enforcing the Accords on its territory (Tab 2).

## DISCUSSION

III. B. Tab 1 - GVN Status and Negotiating Position at Geneva

Tab 2 - French and GVN Responsibilities after Geneva



III. B. 1.

GVN STATUS AND NEGOTIATING POSITION AT GENEVA

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### III. B. 1. GVN STATUS AND NEGOTIATING POSITION AT GENEVA

#### 1. GVN is Independent Before Geneva

##### a. Status of GVN Changes

The sovereign independence of Vietnam was a constant source of irritation and contention between France and the U.S. From the conclusion of World War II until the Geneva Conference, Washington continually urged Paris to follow the nationalist winds and establish an independent State of Vietnam. Coupled with pressures from Vietnamese nationalists, France did move in this direction -- albeit as slowly as possible.

In June, 1948, Bao Dai was persuaded to become political leader of a "State of Vietnam," incorporating Cochinchina, Tonkin, and Annam, which would be "independent...within the French Union." A treaty to this effect, the Elysee Agreements, was drawn up and approved by both sides in March, 1949, but was delayed in ratification by the French Assembly until 29 January 1950. There were a number of qualifications on the meaning of "independence" in the French Union, including complete freedom of movement of French military forces throughout the countries of the Union and legal immunity for French enterprises on the territory of other Union nations. On 3 July 1953, the French were pressured into announcing plans to negotiate and redefine Franco-Vietnamese political relations. But it was not until March, 1954, that these negotiations began, producing on 28 April a joint declaration recognizing what it called "total independence" for Vietnam. Buttinger calls this "a shabby independence." The country became fully sovereign on 3 June 1954.

It is important to remember that French procrastination, among other reasons, on setting the demands for full Vietnamese independence led to hesitancy on the part of the U.S. to intervene militarily in support of the French. With all, the status of the Bao Dai government did begin to change prior to the conclusion of the Geneva Conference -- too late to figure in Franco-American deliberations about "united action," but soon enough to make Vietnam an independent state before the Conference agreed to a settlement of the war.

##### b. Talks Lead Toward GVN Independence

Between July, 1953, and April, 1954, French and Vietnamese representatives had a series of talks on ways to complete the independence of Vietnam promised in France's 3 July 1953 declaration. On 8 March 1954, the final round of talks began in Paris, and at a meeting on 28 April, agreement was reached by a Franco-Vietnamese political committee on the text of separate treaties of independence and association, with the latter (consisting of seven articles) to be spelled out in subsequent conventions. Premier Laniel and Vice President Nguyen Trung Vinh signed a common declaration that same day which specified that the treaties would come into force

upon ratification by the two governments. But, the ratification process was delayed for over a month. The U.S. Mission in Saigon was clearly annoyed that the long-awaited break in the Franco-Vietnamese deadlock did not lead immediately to ratification. The Mission speculated that the French were delaying to keep a free hand at Geneva by making no commitments on Vietnam until the outcome of the conference could be known. The Mission noted that in so doing, the French were only feeding the doubts and suspicions of the Vietnamese about future French intentions toward Indochina. 1/ Washington, for its part, refused to consider the 28 April initialling of agreements as satisfying its pre-condition on complete Vietnamese independence. 2/

c. GVN Independent After 4 June 1954

Not until 4 June, did the French National Assembly finally ratify the two treaties. 3/ By the Treaty of Independence, Vietnam was recognized "as a fully independent and sovereign State invested with all the competence recognized by international law." Vietnam agreed to replace France "in all the rights and obligations resulting from international treaties or conventions contracted by France on behalf or on account of the State of Vietnam or of any other treaties or conventions concluded by France on behalf of French Indochina insofar as those acts concern Vietnam." In other words, the GVN assumed responsibility for all agreements executed prior to ratification of the independence treaty. Under the accompanying Treaty of Association, Vietnam's status as an equal in the French Union was acknowledged for the first time, and with it the right (subsequently re-confirmed) to determine its extent of participation in the Union. The State of Vietnam was, therefore, a fully independent entity by 4 June 1954. France's international obligations in or for Vietnam as of that date were freely taken over by the GVN. This was in contrast, it might be added, to the DRV's abrogation of agreements concluded in Vietnam's behalf by France when Ho's regime took power on 2 September 1945. 4/

d. GVN and DRV Status at Geneva Differ

The final communique of the Berlin Conference (18 February 1954) specified that the Indochina phase of the Geneva deliberations would be attended by the United States, Great Britain, Communist China, the Soviet Union, France, "and other states concerned." Invitations to participants, it was further agreed, would be issued only by the Berlin conferees (U.S., UK, USSR, and France).

There had been some doubt as to the status of the DRV at the upcoming Indochina convention, but subsequent talks between Molotov and Bidault in April clarified the position of the DRV. 5/ Although the DRV was still considered a rebel group by the West, rather than an interested State, admission of the Viet Minh to the conference was never a serious problem. As one of the principal combatants whose consent to a cease-fire was considered indispensable, the Viet Minh could hardly be



ignored. Moreover, the Soviet Union indicated to the French that it would not accept the presence of delegates from the Associated States unless the DRV were admitted to the conference. 6/ The principal Western objection concerning the DRV was that the invitation had been tendered to the Viet Minh not only by the Soviet Union but also by Communist China, a move admitted by Molotov at the first plenary session on 8 May and protested by France and the United States. 7/

Word of the DRV's admission naturally angered the Bao Dai government. When informed of Franco-Soviet Agreement on the DRV's admission, the Bao Dai government decided that Vietnam would go to the conference only upon invitation of the Western Big Three -- that is, only if the SVN status differed from that of the DRV. On 2 May the invitations arrived with the Soviets being informed that GVN participation would in no way confer de jure recognition on the DRV. 8/ Although the Bao Dai government could not bar the DRV from the conference table, it did not accord Ho's regime anything more than the status of a belligerent.

There was, then, a distinction between the status of the DRV and the GVN at the Geneva Conference. Whereas all the major powers implicitly or explicitly recognized the full status of the GVN as a state, the Western powers conceded only belligerent status for the DRV/Viet Minh. In practice, however, the Viet Minh were much more a part of the negotiating process, particularly as regards military arrangements. The GVN, in its own right, pursued a consistent public line, emphasizing its independence and its hope for the continued political unity of Vietnam -- under Bao Dai.

## 2. GVN Unable to Forestall Partition

### a. GVN Requests Written Assurance Country Will Not be Partitioned

At the time the Conference began, the State of Vietnam was concerned and suspicious about the possibilities of a partitioning of the country. Mindful of past instances of partition in Korea and Germany, and deeply in doubt of French willingness to stand firm against Viet Minh territorial claims, the GVN urged the French government to give written assurance that Paris would not seek a division of Vietnam. On 25 April, Bao Dai had served notice on the French that his government would not tolerate partition. GVN representatives in Paris issued a communique in the name of Bao Dai's cabinet which noted various plans in the air for a partition of Vietnam. The communique stated that a partition "would be in defiance of Vietnamese national sentiment which has asserted itself with so much strength for the unity as well as for the independence of its country. Neither the Chief of State nor the national government of Vietnam admit that the unity of the country can be severed legally..." In calling for French assurances that they would not negotiate a sacrifice of Vietnamese interests with the "rebels," the communique implied that the Vietnamese government would not sign the April treaties until such assurances were received. And, the GVN cabinet warned that a compromising agreement would never receive Vietnam's approval:



"...neither the Chief of State, nor the Vietnamese Government, will consider themselves as bound by decisions running counter to the interests, i.e., independence and unity, of their country that would, at the same time, violate the rights of the peoples and offer a reward to aggression in opposition to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and democratic ideals." 9/

b. France Assures GVN it Will Not Seek Partition

In response to this clear-cut statement, the French came forward with both oral and written promises. On 3 May, Maurice Dejean, the Commissioner General for Indochina, said in Saigon:

"The French government does not intend to seek a settlement of the Indochina problem on the basis of a partition of Vietnamese territory...Formal assurances were given on this subject last April 25 by the French minister for foreign affairs to the minister for foreign affairs of Vietnam, and they were confirmed to him on May 1." 10/

Written assurance came from Bidault on 6 May, when he wrote Bao Dai that the task of the French government was to establish peace in Indochina, not "to seek here [at Geneva] a definitive political solution." Therefore, the French goal would be, said Bidault, to obtain a cease-fire with guarantees for the Associated States, hopefully with general elections in the future. Bidault continued:

"As of now, I am however in a position to confirm to Your Majesty that nothing would be more contrary to the intentions of the French government than to prepare for the establishment, at the expense of the unity of Vietnam, of two states having each an international calling (vocation)." 11/

c. DRV Admits Feasibility of Partition

In their talks with the Viet Minh, however, the French found their adversary as stubborn at the bargaining table as on the battlefield. The negotiations during most of May made insignificant progress; but toward the end of the month, the Viet Minh made their first major concession when they strongly hinted that, given the right conditions, they might lift their demand for a united Vietnam. This, it can be speculated, was seen by Paris as a way of getting itself off the hook. While it may have been unacceptable to negotiate all of Vietnam away, half of Vietnam could be sold to the U.S. as a realistic compromise.

On May 24, Hoang Van Hoan, DRV Ambassador to Peking and spokesman of the DRV delegation, informed a special envoy of the French newspaper Le Monde (Jean Schwoebel) that a military settlement through a cease-fire



need not, as the Viet Minh had previously insisted, be preceded by a political settlement. Hoan reportedly stated: "It is first necessary to have a cease-fire. We do not pose a single prior political condition. If, in the plan of M. Dong, political proposals precede those which concern the cease-fire, it is solely a question of presentation..." 12/ Hoang Van Hoan's statement was confirmed the next day when Pham Van Dong, speaking at the sixth restricted session, referred for the first time to territory under Viet Minh control. Dong's proposals included specific reference to areas under the control of each Vietnamese state; in regrouping forces of the two sides, he suggested that territorial readjustments also be made so that each side would be able to have complete economic and administrative, as well as military, control. So as not to be misunderstood, Dong further urged that a line of demarcation be drawn that would be topographically suitable and appropriate for transportation and communication within each state. 13/ Thus, quite contrary to French and Vietnamese expectations, the Viet Minh had opened the way toward partition, and appeared willing to contemplate the creation, albeit temporary, of separate zones of political control.

#### d. French Opposition to Partition Collapses

French support of GVN opposition to partition, which Bidault upheld privately to Smith and Eden at Geneva, 14/ collapsed once the new government of Pierre Mendes-France took over in mid-June. Mendes-France, keenly aware of the tenor of French public anti-war opinion, was far more disposed than his predecessor to make every effort toward achieving a reasonable settlement, and he quickly foresaw that agreement with the Viet Minh was unlikely unless he accepted the concept of partition. His delegate at Geneva, Jean Chauvel, and the new Commissioner General for Indochina, General Paul Ely, reached the same conclusion. 15/

At a high-level meeting in Paris on 24 June, the new government thoroughly revised the French negotiating position. The objectives for subsequent talks, it was decided, would be: (1) the regroupment of forces of both sides and their separation by a line at about the 18th parallel; 16/ (2) the establishment of enclaves under neutral control in the two zones, one for the French in the area of the Catholic bishoprics at Phat Diem and Bui Chu, one for the Viet Minh at an area to be determined; (3) the maintenance of Haiphong in French hands in order to assist in the regroupment. At this same meeting, it was also decided that, for the purpose of psychological pressure on the Viet Minh, if not military preparedness for future contingencies, France should announce plans to send a contingent of conscripts (later determined as two divisions) to Indochina. 17/

### 3. GVN Refuses to Accept French Leadership

#### a. Vietnamese are Stubborn and Unyielding

The State of Vietnam delegation at Geneva was determined to be intimidated neither by the DRV and its communist allies, nor by the



Western powers. The GVN representatives continually referred to their sense of responsibility to the Vietnamese people and to national aspirations for unity and freedom. The obvious dependence of the GVN on the military power of the West was not mirrored by an accompanying political spirit of accommodation: the GVN attitude at Geneva must be characterized as stubborn, unyielding, and idealistic. The GVN was the one nation at Geneva that remained completely unmoved by the spirit of compromise.

b. GVN Consistently Opposes Partition

The attitude of GVN toward the Geneva Settlement was the product not only of its non-recognition of the DRV, but also of its hostility to partition and its opposition to national elections held in a divided country. Evidently quite independent of American instigation or pressure, the Saigon government concluded well in advance of the Conference termination on 21 July that it could not accept what it regarded as a set of agreements contracted in defiance of Vietnamese aspirations and without GVN consent. Nguyen Quoc Dinh, speaking for the GVN in the third plenary session (12 May) at Geneva, first read into the record in detail the new treaty guaranteeing GVN independence, then laid down his country's unyielding opposition to any agreement which would tend to split the country either geographically or politically. Any document tabled for consideration, said Quoc Dinh, "Must not lead to partition, either direct or indirect, final or provisional, de facto or de jure, of the national territory." Free elections can be held, he asserted, "as soon as the UN Security Council has decided that the authority of the State has been established in the whole of the territory, and that conditions of freedom have been obtained." 18/ In the fifth restricted session, on 24 May, Quoc Dinh again stressed the GVN's total independence from France:

"...the problem of the independence of Vietnam dominates all events in Indochina whether considered from the point of view of the independence which the state of Vietnam has secured as a result of negotiations with France, or from that of the independence which Vietnam must defend from all foreign invaders." 19/

On the following day, Quoc Dinh repeated, in the Sixth Restricted Session, that the GVN "would not agree to any plan which would result in the partition of Vietnam." Any partition, he said, would incur "the grave danger one would gradually move down a path which would lead to what his people feared most." 20/ On the 27th of May, Quoc Dinh once again spoke on partition. He reminded the other delegates that the GVN had finally achieved independence, the first of its aspirations. The second aspiration, also achieved, was territorial integrity. The GVN could not now accept partition "without betraying its own people":

"With reference to Vietnam, the Vietnam delegation wished to warn the conference against any measures tending to divide the national territory. If a division



of Vietnam were to be sanctioned, the result would not be peace but only a pause before fresh hostilities... Partition would therefore mean sooner or later -- probably sooner -- a renewal of war." 21/

On 29 May, speaking in rebuttal to the DRV delegation, Quoc Dinh stated, "it is impossible for a people to accept of its own free will a mutilation of its country...No Vietnamese patriot could accept partition." This marked the fourth successive meeting in which the GVN delegate emphasized his country's point of view on partition, elections, or both subjects. This emphatic repetition continued. In the Seventh Plenary Session, on 10 June, speaking of a statement made by Molotov, Quoc Dinh accused the USSR of laboring under certain misunderstandings of the GVN and, for the fifth time since tabling his proposals, he repeated the DRV position:

"I noted in his statement...what I suppose was a mistake of inadvertent omission. He said that only the Viet Minh delegation had proposed that a free general election should take place in Vietnam. I'm sorry that I must contradict. The Delegation of the State of Vietnam also had the honor to propose such elections; the difference being that, whereas the Delegation of Viet Minh proposed that there should be no international supervision which, in the present circumstances, means that elections could not possibly be honest and true, the Delegation of the State of Vietnam has proposed that elections should take place under international supervision." 22/

Quoc Dinh then reasserted the complete independence of GVN from France, referring to the treaty of 4 June 1954. A week later, the Vietnamese delegate was again pushing his case on the floor of the conference:

"As regards the independence of our country, it is a well-known fact that we have indicated the contents of two treaties we had with the French on that...As regards the elections, we ourselves, in our proposal of May 12, have taken the initiative of proposing elections in Vietnam. These elections must be free, sincere, and supervised. The best control would be exercised by the UN." 23/

The GVN insistence on territorial integrity and on elections only after full control was pressed with great energy -- almost with vehemence -- up to the very last moment of the Geneva Conference.

#### c. GVN not Informed of French-DRV Agreements

The evidence suggests that it was not until sometime in early July that the Bao Dai government learned of France's readiness to partition the country, given an acceptable demarcation line. According to a

CIA source, based upon the report of a nationalist southern Vietnamese with "extensive" political contacts, Diem was greatly troubled in early July over France's apparent inclination to abandon the North rather than seek to retain a foothold there. 24/ Diem was said to be convinced that partition would be suicidal, since it would put an end to active anti-Viet Minh resistance. Moreover, Diem was convinced that the French intended to maintain a hold on the South only through manipulating independent irregular forces, such as the armed sects to whom the French allegedly were providing rifles.

d. Note to French Delegation Rejects Partition

GVN anger at hints of a possible French sellout on the partition issue was reflected in a note handed the French delegation (and, without France's knowledge, to the U.S. delegation also) by Nguyen Huu Chau of the Vietnamese delegation on 17 July 1954. The note maintained that not until 16 July did Vietnam learn that at the very time the French High Command had ordered the evacuation of troops from important areas in the Tonkin Delta, the French had also "accepted abandoning to the Viet Minh all of that part situated north of the eighteenth parallel and that the delegation of the Viet Minh might claim an even more advantageous demarcation line." The Vietnamese delegation protested against having been left "in complete ignorance" of French proposals, which were said not to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people." Disparaging the regroupment plan and the "precarious" nature of the cease-fire being considered, the note again urged that a cease-fire be accompanied by the disarmament of "all the belligerent forces in Vietnam." This would be followed by provisional United Nations control of all Vietnam "pending the complete re-establishment of security, of order and of peace...which will permit the Vietnamese people to decide their destiny by free elections." UN control of a unified Vietnam, the note stated, was preferable to "its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery." 25/

e. Vietnamese Register Opposition to Elections

The long-standing GVN hostility to partition, expressed well in advance of final agreement to that arrangement, was paralleled by a wariness of a national plebescite on unification. In June, 1954, the Saigon Mission cabled Washington that a national election:

"...to which Department quite rightly attaches importance...is now of less significance in Vietnam than before owing to general feeling of panic and anxiety lest entire country be lost through unfortunate armistice terms. Press has announced that decrees will presently be signed by Bao Dai providing for municipal elections and, with exception of Saigon-Cholon, for direct election of mayors. This should



to some extent meet Department's requirement in this regard although it is far less than national elections or preparations for National Constituent Assembly." 26/

The GVN protest note to the French of 17 July asserted that a cease-fire without disarmament was incompatible with a plebiscite. They held further that the regroupment of the armed forces of the belligerents into separate north-south zones compromised in advance the freedom of any future elections. Moreover, in the GVN view, elections could be considered only after internal security and peace had been re-established, thereby excluding a set time-frame. 27/ In short, the GVN argued strongly against any scheduled post-settlement national election, and warned that a plebiscite to determine a government for a unified Vietnam could hardly be envisaged with the northern zone controlled by communist armed forces.

f. GVN Rejects Draft of Final Declaration

On 18 July, GVN, in a conference session, Foreign Minister Tran Van Do spoke out against the draft Final Declaration of the Conference which had been circulated among the delegations. He said that Vietnam could not associate itself with the declaration, and pointed in particular to the conditions for a cease-fire, which stipulated a division of the country, and to Vietnam's lack of an opportunity to present its own proposals. Tran Van Do requested the right to offer Vietnam's own draft declaration at another plenary session. 28/

g. GVN Presents Counter-Proposals

The next day, 19 July, the Vietnamese delegation offered its proposals, an elaboration of the ideas contained in the note to the French delegation. The proposal warned that the French, Soviet, and Viet Minh drafts all spoke of a provisional partition, whereas the inevitable result would in fact be "to produce in Vietnam the same effects as in Germany, Austria, and Korea." The proposal went on: "It would not bring the peace which is sought for, deeply wounding the national sentiment of the Vietnamese people; it would provoke trouble throughout the country, trouble which would not fail to threaten a peace so dearly acquired." The delegation then renewed its plan for a cease-fire in small regroupment zones; the disarming of irregular troops and, after a fixed period, of all Viet Minh troops; the withdrawal of foreign troops simultaneous with disarmament of the Viet Minh; and UN control of the cease-fire, the regroupment, the disarmament and withdrawal, the elections which would follow the restoration of order, and national administration. 29/

Tran Van Do's proposal did not receive consideration at the final plenary session of the Geneva Conference on 21 July. 30/ The delegation head protested this as well as the "hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Viet Minh High Commanders only..." Furthermore, Tran Van Do protested the abandonment of national territory



to the Viet Minh even though still occupied by Vietnamese troops, and the setting up of a date for national elections by a military command without Vietnamese agreement. He concluded: "...the Government of the State of Vietnam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom." After other delegation leaders had indicated consent to the military agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities and Final Declaration, Tran Van Do spoke again. He requested the Conference to incorporate in the Declaration the following text:

"The Conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Vietnam undertaking: to make and support every effort to re-establish a real and lasting peace in Vietnam; not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the cease-fire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Vietnam has expressed, especially in its final statement." 31/

Tran Van Do's final effort was dismissed by Eden (as chairman), who urged that, the Final Declaration having already been printed, the conferees take note of Do's statement. Nevertheless, Do's comments then and previously clearly established his government's opposition to the Geneva Accords. That the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed by the French and Viet Minh military commands, the main belligerents, accommodated the fact that the GVN did not recognize the political existence of the DRV. The French, correctly anticipating adverse reactions from the GVN, avoided seeking GVN official consent to the armistice. The French also knew that the GVN would never accede to a partition arrangement, and formal approval of the armistice by the military commands removed the possibility of GVN obstruction of a cease-fire.

#### h. GVN Unable to Influence Outcome

The French had good reason for avoiding communication with the Vietnamese during the last days of the Geneva Conference: scheduled elections were prominent among the concessions that France had to make in order to obtain a settlement at all; and the reunification of Vietnam was deferred by the device of the promised plebiscite. As the Conference drew to a close, and time was running out for the French, they traded on the Viet Minh desire for the future "integrity of the Vietnam state" in order to salvage what they could from their own tottering situation. The French finally agreed to Vietnam-wide elections within two years. As in the partition agreements, the GVN was not able to influence that decision to any appreciable degree. In the larger sense, GVN aspirations were sacrificed to the position of France versus its Communist antagonist. Each side was determined not to allow all of Vietnam to fall into the hands of the other. France agreed to elections, knowing -- as the USSR and China also knew -- that elections might never be held. 32/



#### 4. U.S.-GVN Relations at Geneva

##### a. U.S. Refuses to Influence GVN for France

French readiness to accept a divided Vietnam -- a disposition which before the end of June culminated in abandonment of the enclave alternative in favor of a north-south partition -- was not communicated to the GVN. To the contrary, then and throughout the conference, the GVN delegation and government were informed of shifts in position, if at all, as faits accomplis. During June, for instance, Chauvel on several occasions approached the U.S. with news of the "underground" negotiations with the Viet Minh and with the hope that, once partition had been fixed, the U.S. would "sell" that solution to Saigon. 33/ In the same month, Chauvel, evincing understanding that the U.S. would prefer to disassociate itself from a partition settlement, nevertheless asked if the U.S. would soften Bao Dai opposition by indicating it was the best solution obtainable. Chauvel described Diem and Buu Loc as "difficult," unrealistic, and unreasonable in their opposition, and likely to upset the delicate negotiations. 34/ The U.S. consistently reacted negatively to these approaches, in the undoubtedly correct belief that the French were merely attempting to identify the U.S. with the partition concept in Vietnamese eyes. For example, Secretary Dulles instructed the U.S. Ambassador on 2 July concerning Diem as follows:

"It seems to me that the new Vietnamese Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, who has the reputation of uncompromising nationalist, is quite in the dark about developments critically affecting country he is trying to lead. We fear that if results of French negotiations with communists are revealed to him as a fait accompli, the very reaction French wish to avoid will result. You should therefore indicate our concern to the French and ascertain their own intentions with respect to consulting him or minimizing his resentment and their views with respect to plans and prospects for maintaining order in South Vietnam." 35/

By refusing to act as intermediaries for the French, the U.S. in turn kept free of entanglement in a "French solution" to the Vietnam problem.

##### b. French Disregard U.S. Requests, Remain Aloof from GVN

French aloofness from the GVN continued into July. Despite U.S. requests of the French delegation that the GVN be kept informed of developments, the French remained wary of contact for fear of provoking a GVN reaction that, in turn, might fracture the delicate French discussions with the Viet Minh. Chauvel consequently informed U. Alexis Johnson that "he was handling this [liaison with the GVN] through members of his staff and was avoiding direct contact with Vietnamese in order not to have to answer their questions." 36/ When Offroy, another member of the French

delegation, suggested that the U.S. placate the Vietnamese with assurance of free world political, economic, and military support after the settlement, U. Alexis Johnson replied that this was a matter which the French had to handle. 37/

c. U.S. Declines to Support Final GVN Position

When the penultimate session of the Conference recessed, Tran Van Do and another member of his delegation, Tran Van Chuong, explained Vietnam's position to U. Alexis Johnson. Even though they admitted that they recognized the impracticality of the GVN proposals, the GVN delegation felt that "they must make the moral position of their government clear to the world and to the Vietnamese people. If the other side rejected it, the position of their government would have been improved." U. Alexis Johnson observed that time was short for another plenary session; he suggested that they ask Mendes-France for an extension of his self-imposed deadline for concluding the negotiations. After some hesitation, they did so, and Mendes-France, although he urged the Vietnamese to circulate their proposal, stated he definitely could not ask the French National Assembly for more time at Geneva. Johnson at this point "reminded Mendes-France of the U.S. position on GVN concurrence with any agreement.. Mendes-France [said] he was very conscious of this and was asking De Jean [sic] immediately to go to Cannes to see Bao Dai." 38/ Nothing came of this exchange.

In summary, however, it must be said that while the GVN attained none of its major objectives, and while it received little support from the U.S., it continued to exist. Its territorial and political integrity below the 17th parallel was assured, after a fashion, for at least two years by the Geneva Accords.



III. B. 2.

FRENCH AND GVN RESPONSIBILITIES AFTER GENEVA

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### III. B. 2. French and GVN Responsibilities After Geneva

#### 1. French Presence Does Not Imply French Sovereignty

The fact that French Union forces were still in Vietnam at the time the Geneva military agreements were signed, and that they remained there during and after the Conference, need not be interpreted as evidence of lack of Vietnamese sovereignty. French Union forces could hardly have left the country immediately without surrendering all Vietnam to the communists, and without inviting the slaughter of the Vietnamese National Army. French officers and noncommissioned officers led the latter troops. Clearly, only a gradual withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps was reasonable in view of the prevailing military situation. The GVN accepted these realities and recognized the need for continued French presence. The French government, in granting the GVN independence had agreed that the Expeditionary Corps would be pulled out of Vietnam at the request of the GVN -- although no doubt it hoped to delay that day. In fact, the French moved swiftly after Geneva, under American urging, to relinquish to the GVN the full trappings of the sovereignty granted in June, 1954. By mid-September, the turning over of the civil service, police, and other public administration in South Vietnam was formally completed. By February, 1955, the Vietnamese Army was placed under the command of Vietnamese leaders, and the French accepted American primacy in advising, training, and equipping GVN armed forces.

#### 2. France Is The Executor Of The Geneva Agreements

##### a. GVN Does Not Inherit French Responsibilities

Article 27 of the Armistice agreements signed by France states in part: "The signatories of the present Agreement and their successors in their functions shall be responsible for ensuring and observance and enforcement of the terms and provisions thereof..." That clause seemed to obligate the State of Vietnam in the event France abrogated its responsibilities -- but even if construed thusly, the obligation extended only to "the present [military] Agreement," and not to the political provisions included in the unsigned Final Declaration. It is also possible to construe the reference to "successors" as a binder on the procession of French governments likely to follow Mendes-France. In any event, the State of Vietnam explicitly denied responsibility for all the agreements concluded by France at Geneva, although it pledged not to interfere with the cease-fire. 1/ The declarations of Vietnamese disavowal were early, repeated and specific. Moreover, these declarations included warnings that the partition and elections provided for by the Geneva Conference would lead to renewed violence. Examples of these statements follow:



Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
2	12 May 54	Geneva Conference "must not lead to partition, either direct or indirect, final or provisional, de facto or de jure, of the national territory."	Elections can be held "as soon as the <u>UN</u> Security Council has decided that the authority of the State has been established in the whole of the territory, and that conditions of freedom have been obtained..."
3	25 May 54	State of Vietnam "would not agree to any plan which would result in the partition of Vietnam." Partition involved "grave danger."	
4	27 May 54	"...The Vietnam delegation wished to warn the Conference against measures tending to divide the national territory. If a division of Vietnam were to be sanctioned, the result would not be peace, but a pause before fresh hostilities: There was no example of a country torn physically apart which had not endeavored to recover its unity and its historic frontiers. Partition would therefore mean sooner or later -- probably sooner -- a renewal of war."	
5	29 May 54	"We do believe that there are certain principles which should guide us. Among these principles is the political and territorial integrity of the Vietnamese country. When it was agreed that representatives of Vietnam should attend this conference, it is obvious that one could not ignore the consequences of this attendance. It is impossible for a people to accept of its own free will a mutilation of its country... No Vietnamese patriot could accept partition."	
6	10 Jun 54		"The delegation of the State of Vietnam...had the honor to propose...elections;...whereas the Delegation of Viet Minh proposed that there should be no international supervision which, in

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN  
(Continued)

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
6 (Continued)			the present circumstances, means that elections could not possibly be honest and true, the Delegation of the State of Vietnam has proposed that elections should take place under international supervision."
7	16 Jun 54		The GVN, "In our proposal of May 12, have taken the initiative on proposing elections...these elections must be free, sincere, and supervised. The best control would be exercised by the U.N."
8	17 Jul 54	"The de facto partition...does not take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people...Vietnam would prefer...provisional control by the United Nations over a truly unified and independent Vietnam to its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery."	"Regroupment...reinforces the threat that they constitute to the free expression of the will of the people. Therefore not only does such a cease fire not lead to a durable peace, since, ignoring the will for national unity, it provokes the people to 'unify' the country, but, by the consolidation of the armed forces now facing each other, it violates in advance the liberty of the future elections...The cease fire...far from leading to peace, makes peace improbable and precarious."
9	18 Jul 54	"In order to avoid any misunderstanding <u>Tran Van Do</u> wished to state firmly that Vietnam delegation could not associate itself with any discussion of this <u>Final Declaration</u> ...Vietnam does not agree to conditions advanced for cessation of hostilities...Delegation of Vietnam can only protest the idea of partition...Vietnamese delegation flatly rejects both drafts submitted to the conference ...Vietnamese delegation cannot accept declaration or agreement where Vietnam, which <u>was</u> invited to the conference as <u>an</u> existing state, <u>is</u> not even mentioned."	



Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN  
(Continued)

<u>Note</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>On Partition</u>	<u>On Elections</u>
10	19 Jul 54	<p>"French, Soviet and Viet Minh drafts all admit the principles of a partition of Vietnam in two zones, all of North Vietnam being abandoned to the Viet Minh. Although this partition is only provisional in theory, it would not (repeat not) fail to produce in Vietnam the same effects as in Germany, Austria, and Korea. It would not bring the peace which is sought for, deeply wounding the national sentiment of the Vietnamese people, it would provoke trouble throughout the country, trouble which would not fail to threaten a peace so dearly acquired."</p>	<p>"The Vietnamese Delegation therefore proposes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A cease fire on present positions.</li><li>2. Regroupment of troops in two zones which would be as small as possible.</li><li>3. Disarmament of irregular troops.</li><li>4. After a period to be fixed, disarmament of Viet Minh troops and simultaneous withdrawal of foreign troops.</li><li>5. Control by the United Nations<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Of the cease fire.</li><li>B. Of the regroupment.</li><li>C. Of the disarmament and the withdrawal.</li><li>D. Of the administration of the entire country.</li><li>E. Of the general elections, when the United Nations believe that order and security will have been everywhere truly restored</li></ol></li></ol>

This proposal made on the formal instructions of His Majesty Bao Dai, and of President Ngo Dinh Diem, shows that the Chief of State of Vietnam once more places the independence and the unity of his country above any other considerations, and that the national government of Vietnam would prefer this provisional UN control over a truly independent and United Vietnam to its maintenance in power in a country dismembered and condemned to slavery."

Geneva Conference Declarations of GVN

Note    Date

On Partition

On Elections

11    21 Jul 54

"Mr. Tran van Do (State of Viet-Nam) (Interpretation):  
Mr. Chairman, the Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam when it tabled its proposal, saw an armistice without a partition, even provisional, of Viet-Nam through disarmament of all belligerent forces after their withdrawal into perimeters as limited as possible and by the establishment of a provisional control by the United Nations on the whole of the territory, while the re-establishment of order and peace would enable the Vietnamese people to decide its fate through free elections.

"The Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam protests against the fact that its proposal has been rejected without an examination, a proposal which is the only one to reflect the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. It requests urgently that the demilitarization and neutralization of the Catholic communities, the Bishoprics of the Delta in North Viet-Nam be at least accepted by this Conference.

"It solemnly protests against the hasty conclusion of the Armistice Agreement by the French and Vietminh High Commanders only, whereas the French High Command does command Vietnamese troops only through a delegation of powers given by the head of the State of Viet-Nam, whereas especially many provisions of this Agreement are of a nature to be seriously detrimental to the political future of the Vietnamese people.

"It further solemnly protests against the fact that this Armistice Agreement abandons to Vietminh territories some of which are still occupied by Vietnamese troops and which are, nevertheless, fundamental to the defense of Viet-Nam against a greater Communist expansion, and results practically even in depriving the State of Viet-Nam from its right to organize its defense by other means than by the maintenance of the foreign army on its territory.

"It also solemnly protests against the fact that the French High Command was pleased to take the right without a preliminary agreement of the Delegation of the State of Viet-Nam to set the date of future elections, whereas we deal here with a provision of an obviously political character. Consequently, the Government of the State of Viet-Nam requests that this Conference note that it does protest solemnly against the way in which the Armistice has been concluded and against the conditions of this Armistice which have not taken into account the deep aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

"And the Government of the State of Viet-Nam wishes the Conference to take note of the fact that it reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence, and freedom.



\* \* \*

"...as regards the final Declaration of the Conference, the Vietnamese Delegation would request the Conference to incorporate in this Declaration after Article 11, the following text:

'The Conference takes note of the Declaration of the Government of the State of Viet-Nam undertaking:

'to make and support every effort to re-establish a real and lasting peace in Viet-Nam;

'not to use force to resist the procedures for carrying the cease-fire into effect, in spite of the objections and reservations that the State of Viet-Nam has expressed, especially in its final statement.'

\* \* \*

It has been held that, the declaratory policy of the State of Vietnam disassociating itself from the Geneva Accords notwithstanding, Vietnam was obligated by the Treaty of Independence (4 June 1954) to accept France's action on its behalf at Geneva. Yet, the reference in the Treaty of Independence to Vietnam's observance of treaties and conventions signed for it by France is in the past tense; no provision is made for France to conclude binding agreements after 4 June on Vietnam's behalf. The passage of Article 27 of the Geneva Agreements in question charges France with the responsibility of insuring Western compliance with the terms of the agreements, as far as the southern part of Vietnam was concerned. Indeed, throughout the conference, France was one of the two principal protagonists, shaped the final position accepted by the West, and signed the cease-fire agreements (the final declaration was not signed, an oral declaration of assent being substituted when it became clear that the U.S. would not sign -- the U.S. refrained also from joining in the oral assent). French forces and political elements were present in South Vietnam and were not required, under the agreements, to be removed. It was not at this time envisioned by any of the Geneva Convention nations that France would precipitately withdraw its armed forces from Vietnam.

b. GVN Position Is Anomalous

It was generally recognized at Geneva that the position of the GVN was, at best, contradictory. The GVN asserted its desire for international status by demanding concessions which the other nations considered impossible. The GVN also was severe in criticism of the French, while at the same time acknowledging a debt to France for its very existence in the face of Viet Minh military and political pressures -- which even France, at that time, could barely sustain. The unsupported opposition of the GVN was understood by the other nations as a small country's fight for survival.

Partition, regroupment, and cease-fire conditions intended to lead to a final political settlement at Geneva, were all imposed on Saigon. While it is true that the alternatives offered by the GVN were impractical and unacceptable given the extent of Viet Minh territorial and population control, the salient fact is that the GVN, speaking from what it regarded as an independent position, held fast against every proposal that departed from its concepts of national unity and self-determination. The limitations on the GVN's role as an independent participant at the Conference stemmed from French determination to conclude a settlement in line with French interests. France commanded the power to attract Conference support; the GVN did not. However, the GVN was neither obligated by previous commitment, by its legal status, nor by the Accords themselves to abide by the Franco-Viet Minh agreements which emerged. This anomaly ultimately made France, and French presence in Vietnam, pivotal to the fulfillment of the Geneva agreements.



III. B. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S. VerbMin/8, 355
2. U.S. VerbMin/3, 104-105
3. I.C. Restricted/6, 16
4. I.C. Restricted/7, 13
5. I.C. Restricted/8, 8-9
6. U.S. VerbMin/7, 344
7. I.C. Restricted/14, 26
8. SECTO 633, July 17, 1954 (SECRET)
9. SECTO 654, July 18, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL)
10. SECTO 673, July 19, 1954 (SECRET)
11. U.S. VerbMin/8, July 21, 1954, 347-348, 354-355

SUMMARY

It has been charged that Ho Chi Minh was robbed at the conference table of what he had won on the battlefield, that the Geneva Accords were prejudicial in content and implementation to legitimate Viet Minh interests, and that, therefore, the subsequent actions of the Viet Minh are understandable in light of these disappointments. While it is fair to state that the immediate implications of the Accords did not reflect (even according to CIA reports) Viet Minh strength and control in Vietnam at the time of the conference, it is equally important and revealing to understand why. Viet Minh ambitions were thwarted, not so much by Western resistance or treachery, as by Sino-Soviet pressures on them to compromise. If the Viet Minh were to look for villains at the Geneva Conference, in honesty they would have to admit that their interests were compromised by their own communist allies, not the West.

Viet Minh ambitions were broad. The Viet Minh were not only interested in gaining rights to the three-quarters of Vietnam they claimed to have controlled, but in extending their authority throughout Indochina into Laos and Cambodia. Although their offshoots, the Pathet Lao and the Free Khmers, controlled little territory in Laos and Cambodia, the Viet Minh pressed for their full representation in these countries. Arguing that they spoke for all the Indochinese people, the Viet Minh wished to compel or persuade the French to leave the area and then to settle directly with the indigenous and weakened non-communists. They were pressing for a political settlement prior to a military armistice, or, in other words, they wanted to fight while talking. Their specific objectives were: partition at the 13th parallel, a deadline for complete French withdrawal from the North, and nation-wide elections to be held six months after an armistice (Tab 1).

The source of DRV disappointments with the Accords can be traced not so much to Western strength and unity or Western "treachery" as to efforts by the Soviet Union and Communist China to make the conference a success; that is, to bring stability to the area and a settlement to the fighting. Together and separately, Moscow and Peking pressed concessions on the Viet Minh. Invariably, the two principal communist delegates, Chou En-lai and Molotov, played major roles in breaking deadlocks with conciliatory initiatives. While the exact motives of the Soviet Union and Communist China must remain a matter of speculation, the most acceptable explanation for their behavior is that both sought to achieve their objectives in Southeast Asia without triggering U.S. intervention. "Peaceful co-existence" was the hallmark of their diplomacy. The Chinese,



in particular, were interested in border security, buffers, preventing the formation of a U.S. alliance system with bases in the region, and reconstruction at home. The two big communist powers did not hesitate in asserting the paramountcy of their interests over those of the Viet Minh (Tab 2).

#### DISCUSSION

III. C. Tab 1 - DRV Negotiating Position

2 - Sino-Soviet Objectives and Strategy

III. C. 1.

DRV NEGOTIATING POSITION

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### III. C. 1. DRV NEGOTIATING POSITION

#### 1. The DRV is Determined to Press a Very Hard Line

##### a. The DRV Recognizes Its Own Strong Position

The victory at Dien Bien Phu cost the DRV 21,000 men. Ho realized he had paid dearly for this psychologically crippling stroke against the French, and he was determined to make the most of his advantage at Geneva. The effect of Dien Bien Phu on the Western delegations at the conference was evident not only in the initial shock, but also in the continued sensitivity to military developments in Indochina. Thus, of primary importance to the DRV negotiating position was the goal of making political capital from battlefield supremacy. Closely allied with this sense of military invincibility was the Viet Minh belief that France was in political turmoil and, therefore, psychologically weak.

##### b. The DRV Attitude is Defiant

To the DRV, the victories of their troops and the impending collapse of France in Indochina were quite clear. Less clear was the possibility that the U.S., either unilaterally or in some form of united action might intervene. The DRV gambled, however, on the French struggling on alone. In the opening phase of the conference, the Viet Minh released a communication that indicated there was no need to hasten the conclusion of the war:

"We still remember the Korean lesson which taught us that one could negotiate and fight at the same time..." 1/

This attitude of mild defiance was intended not only for consumption in the West but also for the communist countries. The DRV was resisting early pressures of the USSR and the PRC who feared U.S. intervention and a wider war to move quickly to a solution. Instead, the DRV moved rapidly to increase its own forces in the Tonkin Delta, 2/ to compress the French forces there to a smaller territory, and they apparently instructed their delegation to continue pressing a hard line on political concessions. The goal was to delay a settlement until they bettered the military position even further. The DRV was determined to gain every inch that the French could be forced to concede.

##### c. The DRV Outlines Its Proposals

The initial Viet Minh gambit came at the second plenary session of the Conference on 10 May. 3/ Pham Van Dong stated that the DRV was the "stronger" force in "more than three-fourths of the country." He went on to describe the successful administration of this territory by his government, which he said "represents the will of the entire Vietnamese nation..." The opposition, characterized as "the government of the tempo-

rarily occupied zone," did not enjoy popular support, he said, and was merely a tool of the French. Pham Van Dong did not, however, propose that France recognize "the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam throughout the territory of Vietnam," a statement which amounted to a rejection of the Franco-Vietnamese treaties approved on 28 April by Laniel and Nguyen Trung Vinh. He instead offered an eight-point proposal for a political settlement and a cease-fire:

1. Recognition by France of the sovereignty and independence of Viet-Nam throughout the territory of Viet-Nam, and also recognition of the sovereignty and independence of Khmer and Pathet Lao.
2. Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory of Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao within the time limits to be agreed upon by the belligerents. Pending the withdrawal of troops, the dislocation [sic] of French troops in Viet-Nam shall be agreed upon -- particular attention being paid to limit to the minimum the number of their dislocation points. Provision shall be made that the French troops should not interfere in the affairs of local administration in the areas of their dislocation.
3. Holding of free general elections in Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao with a view to constituting a single government in each country, convening of advisory conferences of the representatives of the governments of both sides in Viet-Nam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao -- in each of the States separately and under conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations; the preparation and the holding of free general elections to establish a unified government in each country. Interference from outside should not be permitted. Local commissions will be set up to supervise the preparation for and the carrying out of the elections. Prior to the establishment of unified governments in each of the above-mentioned States, the governments of both sides will specifically carry out the administrative functions in the districts which will be under their administration, after the settlement has been carried out, in accordance with the agreement on the termination of hostilities.
4. The statements by the Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam on the readiness of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam to examine the question of the entry of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam into the French Union in conformity with the principle of free will, and on the conditions of this entry corresponding statements should be made by the Governments of Khmer and of Pathet Lao.



5. Recognition by the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam as well as by Khmer and Pathet Lao, of the economic and cultural interests of France in those countries. After the establishment of unified Governments in Viet-Nam, Khmer, Pathet Lao, the economic and cultural relations of these States with France should be subject to the settlement in conformity with the principles of equality and mutual interest. Pending the establishment of the unified governments in the Three States, the economic and cultural relations of Indochina with France will temporarily remain without a change such as they exist now. However, in the areas where communications and trade ties have been broken off, they can be re-established on the basis of understanding between both sides. The citizens of both sides will enjoy their privileged status to be determined later in matters pertaining to domicile, movement, and business activities on the territory of the other side.
6. The belligerent sides undertake not to prosecute persons who collaborated with the other side during the war.
7. There shall be mutual exchange of prisoners of war.
8. Implementation of measures that are referred to in paragraphs one through seven should be succeeded by the cessation of hostilities in Indochina, and by the conclusion to this end of appropriate agreement between France and each of the Three States which should provide for a complete and simultaneous cease-fire throughout the whole of the Indochinese territory by all armed forces of the belligerent sides, ground, naval, and air force. Both sides, in each of the Three States of Indochina, for the purpose of strengthening the armistice, will carry out a necessary settlement of territories and of the areas occupied by them, and it should also be provided that (a) both sides should not hinder each other during the passage, for the purpose of the above mentioned settlement, by the troops of the other [sic] side over the territory occupied by the other side; (b) the complete termination of transportation into Indochina from abroad of new ground, naval, and air units of personnel, or of any kind of arms or ammunition; (c) to set up control over the implementation of the terms of agreement on the cessation of hostilities, and to establish, for this purpose, in each of the Three States, mixed commissions composed of the representatives of the belligerent sides. 4/

d. The DRV Proposals Demand a Political Settlement Before a Cease-Fire

The meaning of Dong's list of proposals was clear. A political settlement would precede a military agreement (cease-fire) rather than

the reverse, which the French preferred. Elections would take place under the supervision of local commissions, and the DRV preference was for holding them country-wide and soon. By first removing the French, and then by dealing directly with the non-communist Vietnamese on the issues of control and supervision of the cease-fire, regroupment, and general elections, the Viet Minh could legitimately expect a quick take-over of power from the relatively weak Vietnamese National Army. As Dong well knew, the relocation of French forces in the Tonkin Delta into a tighter perimeter was having, and would continue to have, major repercussions on Vietnamese army morale. 5/ Once the French were persuaded to withdraw, the VNA would undoubtedly collapse under Viet Minh military pressure. Moreover, inasmuch as Dong's plan made no allowance for the disarming, much less the regrouping, of indigenous forces on either side, the Viet Minh would be militarily in a virtually unassailable position to control any general election that might be held (if, in fact, the political process were ever to advance that far). Dong's proposal, then, amounted to a request that the French abandon Vietnam.

e. The DRV Indicates Ambitions for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer

In the same speech, Dong evidenced that the DRV's ambitions extended beyond Vietnam. Acting as spokesman for the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer -- whose representatives had formally come under Viet Minh direction with the announcement on 11 March 1951 of formation of a Viet Minh-Free Khmer-Pathet Lao "National United Front" -- Dong argued that these two movements enjoyed widespread popular support and controlled most of the territory of their respective countries. With considerable distortion of history (subsequently corrected by the Laotian and Cambodian delegates), Dong sought to demonstrate that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were de facto governments carrying out "democratic reforms" in the areas their armies had "liberated." The negotiating objective was to gain the status of lawful governments for the Pathet Lao and the Free Khmer. Dong seemed strongly to imply that the DRV spoke not only for itself, but for all the Indochinese peoples.

Dong included the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in his settlement plan. He demanded that France recognize the "sovereignty and independence" of those movements no less than of the DRV:

"...the Peoples of Khmer and Pathet Lao have liberated vast areas of their national territory. The governments of resistance have exerted all their efforts in creating a democratic power and in raising the living standards of the population in liberated areas. That is why the government of resistance of Khmer, as well as that of Pathet Lao enjoy the support of and warm affection of the population in liberated areas and they enjoy great prestige and influence among the population of both countries.



"These governments represent the great majority of the people of Khmer and Lao, the aspirations of whom they symbolize..." 6/

French forces alone were to withdraw from Cambodia and Laos; the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were not "foreign" troops. As in Vietnam, elections then would be held -- but, without neutral or international supervision. During these elections, Dong insisted there must be "conditions securing freedom of activity for patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations..." agreement to which would have guaranteed the functioning with impunity of various communist fronts.

f. The Initial DRV Demands are Excessive

Viet Minh ambitions in Indochina, it must be concluded, were not simply oratorical gestures intended strictly for the establishment of a bargaining position. In the absence of Sino-Soviet pressure and the threat of U.S. participation, it seems clear that the DRV would not have reduced their demands. Viet Minh ambitions were extensive and partially realized. They were, however, excessive and contrary to the compromise mood of their communist allies and to the relatively firm Western position.

2. Later DRV Positions Represent a Compromise

a. The DRV Begins to Soften Its Position

The implacable DRV position ran contrary to Chinese and Soviet desires to forestall American intervention in Indochina, and after an early gesture of unity, it was soon evident that the large communist powers were bringing pressure to bear on the DRV. By 17 May, Pham Van Dong was ready to withdraw from his strong position requiring a political settlement before a cease-fire, and also to give up his demands for seating Khmer and Pathet Lao delegations, although he still insisted that recognition of these two movements was a part of the Vietnam solution:

"As regards procedure, [Dong stated that] his delegation was in full accord with the Soviet proposal that both political and military questions be dealt with together. He also agreed to treating the military questions first not because they were more important but more urgent. The questions of Khmer and Pathet Lao were closely linked to that of Vietnam and could not be separated. He did not see any real question [sic] for considering first the question of Khmer and Pathet Lao." 7/

This softening of the DRV position at Geneva was not reflected in the military operations in Indochina, where the Viet Minh were still determined to achieve control of as much of the Tonkin Delta as possible; in fact, the Viet Minh were planning heavier operations in the Tonkin Delta. A captured document in the last days of May directed Viet Minh commanders

in that area to continue their harassing and guerrilla activities for an unspecified period "pending commitment of the battle corps." 8/

b. A Weak Laniel Position Delays DRV Concessions

The Viet Minh were considering further concessions in late May and early June when it became evident that the Laniel government was cracking at the seams, and that a harder communist line might force either the fall of Laniel or some significant concessions from France. Either of these results would be profitable, since any government replacing Laniel's would certainly be more willing to end the Indochina war. For this reason, the DRV hard line once more came to the fore, to the point that Pham Van Dong was able to reverse himself on some points he had been ready to concede. On 8 June, he insisted once again on the necessity for a political solution prior to discussions of the cease-fire. As a psychological inducement, he added the hint that, whatever the outcome, France would remain influential in cultural and economic fields, and even suggested that some vestige of the French Union concept would continue to exist:

"To this effect, finally, the Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam invites the conference to embark without delay upon the consideration of political questions such as the recognition by France of the sovereignty and of the real independence of Viet-Nam and of the other countries of Indochina, the organization of general elections in Viet-Nam, the relations of Viet-Nam and of France; that is, the question of the economic and cultural interests, as well as the question pertaining to the association of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam to the French Union, and the conditions under which such associations should be effected, and so on and so forth." 9/

Possibly the words "and so on and so forth" give a truer indication of the environment in which this projection of future ties was made. The main point was a demand for immediate general elections in exchange for a cease-fire.

c. The DRV Presents a New Series of Proposals

The USSR backed the DRV at this time, insisting on independence for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, free elections in these states, and withdrawal of all foreign troops. 10/ With the continued demand by the DRV for even more territory than its units held on the ground, and with General Ely stating privately in the field that the French Union troops were "very, very tired," 11/ the Laniel government staggered, lost a vote of confidence, and fell on 12 June. It was replaced, on 18 June, by the government of Mendes-France, pledged to end the war in Indochina by 20 July or step down. While the new French government was being formed, the DRV brought forth a new position, embodied in six points to be agreed on prior to a cease-fire:

1. Complete and real sovereignty and national independence of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.



2. Free general elections by secret ballot throughout the territory of Vietnam.
3. No prosecution of collaborators.
4. Establishment of economic and cultural relations between France and the DRV.
5. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to respect the independence, unity and internal regime of the other states.
6. Other political questions concerning Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia must be settled at a later time in the interests of consolidating peace and the guarantee of democratic rights and national interests of the peoples of Indochina. 12/

d. The DRV Agrees to a Separate Solution for Laos and Cambodia

The speech by Chou En-lai at this meeting seemed to support the DRV view, although it was more mildly stated. In retrospect, however, it appears that this meeting marked a turning point, at least for the DRV on their insistence for including the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer in a settlement. Chou's proposals, contrary to Pham Van Dong's, implied the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces from Laos and Cambodia and also suggested the postponement of a political settlement for those two states:

"I have stated, on several occasions at this conference, that the situations in the three states are not completely alike. That is to say, that the situation in Vietnam is not completely the same as that in Laos, while the situation in Laos is not completely the same as that in Cambodia. Therefore, the concrete situations in Laos and Cambodia should be taken into consideration in working out solutions for the problems of these two countries." 13/

Two days later, Pham Van Dong, in the fifteenth restricted session, announced the decisive termination of efforts to include all of Indochina in the political agreement:

"...I would like to say there have been Vietnam volunteers which fought on the side of the resistance elements of Laos and Khmer. They have been withdrawn. Today if there are such forces they will be withdrawn." 14/

e. The DRV Reluctantly Accepts Partition

In its early proposals, the DRV did not recognize the possibility of partition, aiming instead at a unification of all Vietnam. In conjunction with their demands for immediate elections, this was calculated to give them control of the whole country. Lacking support from

Peking and Moscow, the DRV was forced to give in on this point. Molotov, on 17 May, opened the door by agreeing that military solutions should precede political solutions, and Eden, on 25 May, moved to include on the agenda the question of "regrouping areas for Vietnam." Pham Van Dong, in reply, accepted this concept of including a demarcation line and made the following points:

1. There should be a recognition of the principles of readjusting the areas under control of each state;
2. Readjustment would mean an exchange of territory taking into account actual areas controlled including population and strategic interests;
3. Each side would get territory in one piece to include complete control of the area both economic and administrative;
4. A line of demarcation should be established following the topographical line of territory so that it is easy to follow and would make transportation and communications possible within each state. 15/

The subsequent discussions of a cease-fire and partition were stymied initially by the DRV demand for a demarcation line at the 13th parallel. After two weeks, by 16 June, the DRV reduced this demand to "all of Tonkin and the entire delta area." The French, "without agreeing," said if such an arrangement were made, they "would demand a free hand in the South, indicating area south of the line starting approximately 18th parallel..." 16/ Discussions continued through the rest of June. The French Ambassador, Bonnet, commented on 28 June that the Viet Minh disposition to negotiate arose, in the French opinion, from a fear that the conflict might expand to include the U.S.; 17/ in other words, the DRV had come around to the view of China and the USSR. From this time on, the French increasingly threatened the DRV with the possibility of U.S. intervention, even though, ironically enough, the U.S. was moving further away from such a position:

"Chauvel reports that he spoke most firmly to Dong regarding military discussions. He said French have accepted Viet Minh proposal that Viet Minh receive Tonkin area, including Capitol, but that further Viet Minh proposal for demarcation line is unacceptable. Chauvel reiterated in strongest terms fact that French proposal for demarcation line just north of Dong Hoi would be acceptable to conference and would thus eliminate danger of extension of war." 18/

By 6 July, Pham Van Dong was almost willing to accept the 17th parallel. His attitude indicated that he, personally, was ready to compromise and that he felt his government was coming around:

"Chauvel had seen Dong this morning. On question of demarcation lines, Dong again referred to status of popu-



lations sympathizing with Viet Minh who would be left south of demarcation line proposed by French. He said this question would be easier for him if he could get some general political assurances regarding eventual status these people. Chauvel said Dong indicated that with such assurances he might be able to accept Dong Hoi line." 19/

f. The DRV is Disappointed on Elections

In Pham Van Dong's 10 May plan, a take-over of all Vietnam by the DRV was almost certain. "Foreign" troops would be withdrawn and elections would take place as soon as possible. "Local government" would fill in during the interval. Supervision of the elections themselves would be by locally composed commissions. The French and the GVN vehemently opposed both immediate elections and elections unsupervised by some kind of international commission. There was no movement in this impasse until 16 July when Molotov opened new possibilities by suggesting that a decision on elections be left up to the GVN and DRV after a military settlement was made. The Chinese were willing to concede that elections might not take place for two or three years. Even under these pressures, there was no progress until very near the time set by the French for termination of Geneva talks. On 19 July, at an extraordinary meeting attended by Molotov, Eden, Mendes-France, Chou En-lai, and Pham Van Dong agreement was reached on postponing elections for two years. 20/ This, of course, represented a severe setback for the ambitions of the DRV.

g. The DRV Does Not Achieve Its Goals at Geneva

The DRV, by the end of the conference, had moved a long way from its initial position on every important consideration. The cease-fire was considered ahead of the political decisions. The country was partitioned, giving the GVN about half the total territory, which was probably much more than it deserved on the basis of France-GVN military strength. Elections were put off for two years instead of being held immediately, and control of the elections was to be international rather than local. The Pathet Lao and Free Khmer movements were not represented at the convention, and the DRV had drawn its Viet Minh troops out of Laos and Cambodia. Bernard Fall's comment that the DRV was forced "to accept conditions far less favorable than the military situation warranted" 21/ is reinforced by a detailed analysis of the French military position in the Tonkin Delta by Lacouture and Devillers in La fin d'une guerre, in which the French situation is described as on the verge of collapse. 22/ The DRV, according to Kahin and Lewis, probably expected, however, that the concessions they had made were only temporary:

"...in evacuating its military units from the South, the Viet Minh was not being called upon to abandon its struggle for power, but only to transfer the competition from the military to the political plane. And whether in a military or an exclusively political contest, the Viet Minh confidently expected victory." 23/

This, as Victor Bator points out, was a serious mistake:

"...there must have been some miscalculation at that time on the part of Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They must have thought that South Vietnam Government would never be able to assert its independence and become strong enough to demand the French withdrawal. They underestimated the American interest in South Vietnam and expected to exploit the chaotic conditions in the South for gaining their political ends. However, as has already been observed, the events took a different turn in the South." 24/

Ho commented much later on his personal feelings about the results of the Geneva Conference, and from these comments comes an indication of his feelings on later situations:

"We thought we had achieved something with the French by compromising and it turned out to be shaky. Only through full and unconditional independence can we achieve stability...We are determined to continue to fight until we achieve total victory, that is, military and political..." 25/



III. C. 2.

SINO-SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

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### III. C. 2. SINO-SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

#### 1. USSR and China Motivated by Different Objectives

##### a. Atmosphere at Geneva is Different from Panmunjom

During the Korean War, the initial communist move toward negotiations came at a time of fairly clear-cut military stalemate. Discussions at Panmunjom extended over two years while UN and communist armies fought over small parcels of strategically valuable terrain. In Indochina, to the contrary, the first communist indications of willingness to negotiate came in September 1953 (from both Peking and Moscow), while the Viet Minh were preparing for the "general counteroffensive," and with the French Union forces constricting their defensive perimeter and desperately seeking to prevent large-scale desertions by the Vietnamese. Moreover, a final settlement was reached after only two months of bargaining. The reasons for this unexpectedly rapid and compromise settlement lie in Moscow and Peking. For reasons that were either the same or complementary, these two communist powers created an atmosphere for serious negotiations.

##### b. Soviet Objectives

Unlike the Chinese, the Soviet Union was never explicit about its motivations for working toward a settlement. Nevertheless, there are strong grounds for believing that the Soviets had these goals in view: (1) averting a major war crisis over Indochina that would stimulate Western unity, provide the U.S. with support previously lacking for "united action," and conceivably force Moscow to help defend the Chinese; (2) reducing the prospects for successful passage of the European Defense Community in the French National Assembly; (3) seizing the opportunity to create a communist-controlled enclave in Vietnam which could then be expanded into a new communist state.

##### (1) USSR Seeks to Avert a Major International Crisis

On the first point, the Soviets were surely aware that the United States probably would be prepared, under certain conditions, to consider active involvement in the war. Newspaper reports of the time added both credence and uncertainty to American plans for "united action." The Soviets during this period were caught up, moreover, in a full-fledged policy debate over the import of Eisenhower's defense program for Soviet national security. When the debate was resolved sometime in April 1954, apparently First Secretary Khrushchev's perception of the continued danger of a new world war that might be touched off by a reckless American nuclear strike won out over the relative optimism of Premier Malenkov. Specifically, Moscow probably reasoned that a failure to settle at Geneva would lead to U.S. involvement and escalation in Indochina, that at one point there might be another direct clash between American and Chinese forces, and that the Soviet Union therefore would be called upon to come to the aid of its Chinese ally.



As the Soviets entered the Geneva Conference, then, it seems that one of their primary aims was to diminish the possibility of U.S. intervention, either in the guise of a united action or unilaterally, in Indochina. While this outlook did not prevent the Soviets from seeking to capitalize on the change in administration in Paris from Laniel to Mendes-France, it did work in the general direction of a reasonable settlement that would be honorable for the French and generally acceptable to the Viet Minh. The Russians evidently believed, however, that so long as the French (and the British) were agreeable to a settlement, the Americans would be hard-pressed to disregard their allies and intervene.

(2) USSR Wishes to Prevent French Support of EDC

EDC was also almost certainly on Molotov's mind during the negotiations. There is no evidence to support the contention of some writers that Molotov explicitly baited Mendes-France with a lenient Indochina settlement in return for Assembly rejection of EDC, but Molotov need not have been that explicit. Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interest to pressure the DRV for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby somewhat offset the need for an EDC. Soviet interests, in short, probably dictated the sacrifice of Viet Minh goals if necessary to prevent German re-militarization.

(3) USSR Seizes the Opportunity to Create a New Communist State

Soviet efforts to gain control of Iran, Manchuria, Greece and Korea indicate a possible third objective of their diplomacy at Geneva. In these instances, the Soviet Union attempted to gain control of the target state by establishing a communist enclave in the target state itself. This enclave would become, then, "a first stage in the ultimate absorption of the whole state by the communist bloc." It may have been that, in the Soviet view, the timing for such a move in Vietnam was correct and that control of Vietnam would come without the necessity for military conquest. 1/

c. Chinese Objectives: The Need for Border Security

In contrast to the Soviet position, the Chinese made their goals at Geneva quite clear: (1) emphasizing the commitment to assist "wars of national liberation"; (2) guarding against the possibility of U.S. military intervention; (3) preventing the Indochinese states from becoming U.S. bases or joining the American alliance system; and (4) promoting the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" as part of China's effort to extend its influence across Asia. Central to each of these objectives was the need to create a zone of security that encompassed Laos, Cambodia, and the northern half of Vietnam, to insure China's southwestern flank against intrusion by the U.S. or any other large foreign power.



(1) China's Policy Calls for Assistance to "Wars of National Liberation"

From the moment Chinese troops arrived at the Sino-Vietnamese border, Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh was clearly in line with Peking's policy of assisting wars of national liberation. This theme was alluded to frequently by Chinese delegates at Geneva. The Chinese, however, carefully controlled the dispensation of that aid in support of the war, and only after the Berlin Conference did they significantly augment it to assure the fall of Dien Bien Phu. Regardless of Marxist rationale advanced by China for its policy toward the Viet Minh, China historically had acted to obtain vassal states on its periphery. China's domestic cohesion having been restored, it turned, consistent with centuries of policy towards Vietnam, to projecting its influence into Southeast Asia via Vietnam.

(2) China Wary of U.S. Intervention

In providing less assistance than it could have, Peking may very well have been wary of prompting American intervention and a wider war. In this respect, U.S. warnings to China during 1953 from an American Administration which publicly vowed a very hard line toward the communist bloc could not be ignored by Peking. The Chinese by 1954 had evinced, moreover, greater concern than previously over the military effectiveness of nuclear weapons. Having been through a costly war in Korea, and having decided as early as the Fall of 1952 to give priority to "socialist reconstruction" at home, Peking was in no position to risk provoking the United States. Its willingness to work for a settlement of the Indochina war may have stemmed, in this light, from the conviction that: (a) the DRV had made sufficient military gains for China, i.e., territorial control in northern Vietnam; and (b) that the DRV should not be allowed to provoke the West (and the U.S. in particular) into a precipitous military response that would change the nature of the war and perhaps of China's commitment as well.

(3) China Wishes to Prevent Laos and Cambodia from Becoming U.S. Allies

Besides assuring that a communist state would occupy the northern portion of Vietnam, China also sought to neutralize the two other Indochinese states. Chou indicated at the Conference that he had no objection to the introduction of arms and military personnel into Cambodia or Laos after the cease-fire; 2/ nor did he object to their monarchical form of government, 3/ to their independent handling of internal political problems, 4/ or to their joining the French Union. 5/ Surprisingly, Chou asked no concessions from the French on these counts, although the French had half-expected Chou to press for better trade relations, support for a CPR seat in the United Nations, or French diplomatic recognition of Communist China. 6/ Instead, Chou made clear that China was concerned preeminently about the establishment of U.S. bases in Cambodia and Laos for potential use against the mainland. Concessions to the French may



have been seen by Peking as a way of keeping the French "in" and the Americans out. The rapid collapse of France could create a vacuum into which the U.S. would be forced to move.

The Chinese were disturbed about the prospect of Cambodia, Laos, and the State of Vietnam becoming members of the proposed U.S. security treaty system for Southeast Asia. 7/ When, for example, Chou met with the Cambodian Foreign Minister (Nong Kimny) on 17 July, the Chinese Premier implicitly warned against Cambodian participation in a Southeast Asia pact or acceptance of foreign bases. The consequences of either move by Cambodia, Chou said, would be very serious for Cambodian independence and territorial integrity. And he specifically stated that his remarks applied equally to Laos and Vietnam. 8/ Peking was not interested in new territorial acquisitions; but neither would it tolerate an American military threat close by.

#### (4) China Attempts to Enhance the Image of "Peaceful Coexistence"

A final Chinese objective was to enhance China's image as an Asian power sincerely dedicated to peaceful coexistence. The policy of "peaceful coexistence" was framed in terms of the five principles: mutual friendship, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, non-aggression, equality and mutual respect for territorial integrity. The Chinese invested much time and travel in convincing their Asian neighbors of Peking's sincerity. Seen in this larger context, the Indochina settlement, for which Chou must be credited with a major share, bolstered Peking's image as a dedicated worker for peace whose voice had to be heeded in Asian councils. Not inconsequentially, China's stock in the communist bloc must have risen as well.

### 2. USSR and China Serve as Moderating Influences on the Viet Minh

#### a. Opening Position of Both Countries Supports DRV Hard Line

For a variety of reasons the Soviets and Chinese found it in their respective interests to work for a peaceful settlement of the Indochina War. Although giving the impression, at first, of being fully behind the Viet Minh negotiating position, Molotov and Chou En-lai gradually moved toward accommodation with the French. The two chief communist delegates were in fact instrumental in gaining concessions from the Viet Minh and in proposing acceptable alternatives to the French. At the outset of the Conference, Molotov and Chou outwardly supported without qualification Pham Van Dong's proposal for a political settlement to be followed by a cease-fire. When it became clear that the French were not going to accept that proposal, they evidently agreed that further progress required a separation of military from political discussions. Molotov's suggestion at the first restricted session of 17 May along these lines, and Chou's remark to Eden on 20 May that a cease-fire should have priority, represented real breakthroughs and probably were the cause of Pham Van Dong's willingness to engage in private military discussions with French General Delteil.



b. Shift to Support of Bilateral French-DRV Discussions is Apparent Early

The Soviet and Chinese delegations -- much more than the Viet Minh -- were more anxious for direct Franco-Viet Minh discussions. The fact that Soviet officials on 30 March and again 5 May told Western officials that bilateral talks would be the most profitable form of negotiations for a cease-fire 9/ suggests that the communists' initial backing of Pham Van Dong's proposal may have been simply a trial balloon. Once the French, supported by the U.K. and U.S., refused to budge from their call for an immediate, closely inspected cease-fire, Chou and Molotov were left free to initiate talks in the direction of compromise.

c. USSR and China Change DRV Approach to Cease-fire

The pressure that the Chinese and the Soviets were able to bring to bear apparently forced the DRV to acquiesce in a cease-fire prior to a military settlement. Pham Van Dong had argued for a plan which would have made a cease-fire throughout Indochina contingent on the satisfaction of Viet Minh conditions for general elections and the formation of three united governments. But at the first restricted session of the Conference on 17 May, Molotov pointed out that French proposals up to that point had dealt only with military matters, and proposed therefore that these be dealt with before going on to political arrangements. 10/ The Chinese agreed with this approach. In a conversation with Eden, Chou En-lai concurred in the separation of military from political matters, with priority to a cease-fire. 11/ When, therefore, Hoang Van Hoan reportedly told Le Monde on 24 May that the DRV posed "not a single prior political condition," he was reflecting the views of the Soviets and Chinese as much as paying the way for Dong's initiative of the next day.

d. DRV Responds to Sino-Soviet Pressure on Partition

There is evidence to believe that both the Chinese and the Soviets were instrumental in bringing about a series of Viet Minh concessions on the issue of where to draw the demarcation line between North and South Vietnam. The possibility of partition had been suggested initially to U.S. officials as early as 4 March by a member of the Soviet Embassy in London, apparently out of awareness of Franco-American objections to a coalition arrangement. 12/ The partition line mentioned at that time was the 16th parallel, which would have placed Tourane (Da Nang) in the hands of the Viet Minh (the 16th parallel crosses a few miles south of the port). It was also the Soviets who, on the opening day of the conference, approached the U.S. delegation on partition -- this time averring that the establishment of a buffer state to China's south would be sufficient satisfaction of China's security needs. 13/

In late June, after several rounds of secret Franco-Viet Minh military talks had failed to make headway, Ta Quang Buu (Vice Minister of National Defense) was still insisting on the 13th parallel, which strikes the coast just south of Tuy Hoa, as the partition line. 14/ As suggested



by Lacouture and Devillers, the Viet Minh may have been seeking to capitalize on Mendes-France's reputation as a man of peace, and on the ongoing withdrawal of French Union forces from the southern Delta. 15/ This Viet Minh position underwent a drastic change by the middle of July; and the change can be traced to a meeting between Chou En-lai and Ho Chi Minh at Nanning near the China-Vietnam border. According to CIA reports, Chou applied pressure on Ho to accept a partition line much farther to the North, probably the 17th or 18th parallel. 16/ Pham Van Dong's subsequent compromise position indicating a willingness of the Viet Minh to discuss partition at the 16th parallel seems to have originated in the talks between Chou and Ho. 17/

The French, however, refused to budge from their opposition even though Molotov argued that the 16th parallel represented a substantial Viet Minh concession and demanded a French quid pro quo. 18/ The Soviet delegate then came forward with a new proposal to draw the demarcation line at the 17th. 19/ Precisely what motivated Molotov to make this proposal is not clear. Speculatively, Molotov may simply have traded considerable territorial advantage to the French (much more than was warranted by the actual Tonkin military situation) for some progress on the subject of elections. The Western negotiators, at least, recognized this possibility: Eden considered a line between the 17th and 18th parallels worth trading for a mutually acceptable position on elections; 20/ and Mendes-France observed in a conversation with Molotov that the election and demarcation questions might be linked in the sense that each side could yield on one of the questions. 21/

#### e. Molotov Proposes Compromise on Elections

The French had consistently held out for general elections in Vietnam, but without a time limit. (Election dates for Laos and Cambodia were already set by their constitutions as August and September 1955, respectively.) Molotov, however, reflected Viet Minh thinking in proposing that a date be fixed, offering June 1955, but suggesting that elections might be agreed upon for 1955 with the exact date to be decided between Vietnamese and Viet Minh authorities. 22/ The Chinese proved much more flexible. In a talk with a member of the British delegation, Li K'o-nung argued for a specific date, but said his government was willing to set it within two or three years of the cease-fire. 23/ Once again, the compromise was worked out on Molotov's initiative. At a meeting on 19 July attended by Eden, Mendes-France, Chou, and Dong, Molotov drew the line at two years. 24/ In view of the DRV demand for six months, the French compromise position of 18 months, and the Soviets' own one-year plan, the West had good reason to accept Molotov's offer.

#### f. DRV is Pressed to Give Up Claims for Pathet Lao and Free Khmer Representation

A third instance in which Viet Minh ambitions were cut short by the diplomatic intrusion of their comrades concerned the status of the



Pathet Lao and Free Khmer. Throughout the month of May, the DRV had demanded that representatives of these movements be invited to the Conference to sit, like the Viet Minh, as belligerents wielding governmental power. These demands were consistently rejected by the non-communist side, which argued that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer were creatures of the Viet Minh, guilty of aggression against the Cambodian and Laotian governments (in contrast to the "civil war" in Vietnam), and not deserving status which they had in no way earned. When Molotov, on 17 May, recommended that "military matters" should be considered first, the question of seating the Pathet Lao and Khmer delegations was dropped.

Nevertheless, the Viet Minh persisted in their position on an all-Indochina political settlement when the significant bargaining was reduced to "underground" military talks between them and the French beginning in early June. 25/ The first compromise of the Viet Minh's position came on 20 May when Chou En-lai, in the same conversation with Eden at which the chief Chinese delegate also agreed to separate military from political matters, admitted that political settlements might be different for the three Indochinese states. Chou thus moved a step closer to the Western position, which held that the Laotian and Cambodian cases were substantially different from that in Vietnam. Not surprisingly, the Viet Minh, at a secret meeting with the French on 10 June, suddenly indicated their preference for concentrating on Vietnam rather than demanding the inclusion of Laotian and Cambodian problems in the bilateral discussions. 26/

#### g. Chinese Play a Major Role in Pathet Lao-Free Khmer Exclusion

The Viet Minh's major concern, as indicated on 16 June, was that they at least obtain absolute control of the Tonkin Delta, including Hanoi and Haiphong. 27/ Neither Chou nor the Viet Minh, however, went so far as to dismiss the existence of legitimate resistance movements in Laos and Cambodia. But in ongoing talks with the British, Chou proved far more willing than the Viet Minh to push aside Pathet Lao-Free Khmer interests. On 17 June, at a time when four rounds of secret Franco-Viet Minh military talks had failed to make headway, Chou told Eden that it "would not be difficult" to gain Viet Minh agreement on withdrawing their "volunteers" from Cambodia and Laos. Eden, moreover, got the impression from his meeting with Chou that the latter earnestly wanted a settlement and was greatly concerned over the possible break up of the conference. 28/ Cambodian resistance forces were small, making a political settlement with the Royal Government "easily" obtainable. In Laos, where those forces were larger, regroupment areas along the border with Vietnam and China (Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces) would be required. Asked by Eden whether there might not be difficulty in gaining Viet Minh agreement to the withdrawal of their forces from the two countries, Chou replied it would "not be difficult" in the context of a withdrawal of all foreign forces. 29/

The Chinese, almost certainly with Soviet support, 30/ had made a major breakthrough in the negotiations by implicitly adopting the Western view that the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces did not represent



legitimate, indigenous movements and should be withdrawn. The Viet Minh volte-face came, as in the other cases, soon after. A Laotian delegate reported on 23 June that the Viet Minh were in apparent accord on the withdrawal of their "volunteers" and even on Laos' retention of French treaty bases. The Viet Minh's principal demand was that French military personnel in Laos be reduced to a minimum. Less clearly, Dong made suggestions about the creation of a government of "national union," Pathet Lao participation in 1955 elections for the national assembly, and a "temporary arrangement" governing areas dominated by Pathet Lao military forces. 31/ But these latter remarks were meant to be suggestive; Dong had come around to the Western view (now shared by the Soviets and Chinese) on the important point of removing Viet Minh troops from Laos. Later in the conference, Dong would have to make a similar retreat on Cambodia.

#### h. USSR and China Agree to a Control Commission

While the Viet Minh from the beginning had pressed for no outside control or supervision of either military or political agreements concerning Indochina, all other delegations quickly moved in that direction. The Soviets took the lead on the communist side. The major issue was the composition and voting procedure of the proposed International Control Commission. From the Western standpoint, the ICC should not have had a communist representative, since no communist could be considered neutral. The Soviets retorted, as expected, that Western backing of a Colombo Power (India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Ceylon, or Burma) was subject to the same objection, namely, that each of these nations always would vote with the Western bloc. As the matter evolved, a compromise settlement provided for a three-nation formula including one communist state. Both aspects of this agreement were based on Molotov's original plan. 32/

As to voting procedure, the communists not surprisingly insisted on unanimity, at least for "major questions." The West, while accepting that rule, considered pushing for acceptance of majority voting to determine whether a question was minor or major. 33/ The result (Article 42 of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam) was to specify unanimous agreement among the Commission representatives on matters pertinent to violations, or threats of violations, that might lead to the resumption of hostilities. However, minority reports could be issued where the Commission was unable to agree on a recommendation.

#### 1. Sino-Soviet Influence Has Significant Effect

There is little doubt that the conference would not have been able to move against the initial DRV intransigence without assistance from the Soviets and Chinese. In the opening phase of discussion, both the major powers voiced complete agreement with the DRV in policy and aims, but through a series of moves both powers also made great efforts to soften the DRV hard line and to allow enough flexibility for concessions. The first problem, involving the seating of the Pathet Lao and Khmer, was solved by Soviet and Chinese agreement to postpone -- indefinitely, as it turned out -- any discussion of the question. The second stumbling block was the



Viet Minh insistence on a political solution before a cease-fire. The ability of the Chinese and Soviets to overcome DRV resistance on this point was very encouraging early in the proceedings. Russia and China were active behind the scenes on the question of partition, with Russia taking the initiative even before the conference began, and with both major powers influencing the decisions as the French and Viet Minh moved toward a mutually agreeable demarcation line. The common-sense role that the USSR and China played with reference to Pathet Lao and Free Khmer inclusion brought about a key concession that had nearly stopped the conference -- the need to separate the Vietnam question from the rest of Indochina. The final difficult question, the composition and function of the Control Commission, dragged along for several weeks, but was finally solved with no little assistance of the USSR and China.

SUMMARY

One of the principal controversies surrounding the Geneva Conference concerns the intent of the Armistice and the Final Declaration. While it is clear that the Armistice between the French and the Viet Minh was designed to end the actual hostilities, the political intent of the belligerents, and that of the Conference participants expressed in the Final Declaration, is in doubt. The central issue in dispute is whether or not the participants intended to unify Vietnam, and if so, whether the subsequent actions of the U.S. and the GVN in frustrating that intent make them culpable for the present war.

China and Russia were, in general, pleased with the results of the Geneva Conference, even though they had been forced to accept a settlement considerably at variance from their initial demands. Since these powers were primarily interested in attaining their political goals without triggering a massive response from a united West, cessation of the war on even minimally advantageous terms would allow them time to consolidate gains and to extend their control further into Southeast Asia with fewer risks. They recognized that the DRV did not receive concessions commensurate with its military power and political control, but the Communists, probably miscalculating the future U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, no doubt felt that they could safely transfer the combat from the battlefield to the sphere of politics. However, the final settlement severely compromised DRV expectations and objectives: the line of partition was at the 17th parallel, not the 13th; elections were envisaged after two years, not immediately; supervision was to be by an international body, not by the belligerents themselves; and Communist movements in Laos and Cambodia were denied identity and support, not sanctioned by the Conference. Yet, despite these setbacks and disappointments, the DRV apparently expected to fall heir to all of Vietnam in fairly short order, either through a plebiscite on unification, or by default when the GVN collapsed from internal disorder. (Tab 1)

For the United Kingdom as well as for France, the final outcome at Geneva was in the main satisfactory. The bloodshed had ceased; the danger of broadened conflict was averted. The U.S. understanding of the Accords is more difficult to fathom. Immediately upon the conclusion of the conference, the U.S. representative, Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, stated that the results were the best possible under the circumstances. Both he and President Eisenhower stated that the U.S. "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the [Geneva] agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." President Kennedy in December 1961 used this quote as justification for his support of South Vietnam. But the purpose of



the U.S. declaration remains obscure. It can be argued that its intent was not a long-term U.S. commitment, but an attempt to deter the DRV from attacking the GVN in the two-year period prior to elections. According to this argument, the Eisenhower Administration would have accepted any outcome if assured that the voting were free. A counter-argument is that Smith was throwing down the gauntlet to the Communists. An NSC action immediately following the Conference considered the Accords a "major disaster for U.S. interests" and called for affirmative political action to foreclose further loss. In other words, while the specifics of the Accords were much in line with the U.S. negotiating position, the overall U.S. evaluation of the Conference held that territory had been yielded to the Communists. In this light, the Smith declaration marks the jumping-off point for the concerted U.S. efforts to devise a collective security system for Vietnam and all of Southeast Asia, which culminated in the Manila Pact of September, 1954 (SEATO), and the aid program for Ngo Dinh Diem. (Tab 2)

Interpretations of the spirit of the Accords are as disparate as the interests of the Geneva conferees. Yet, it is difficult to believe that any of the participants expected the Geneva Accords to provide an independent and unified Vietnam. The Communist states -- the Soviet Union, Communist China, and the DRV -- apparently assumed that the development of a stable regime in the South was very unlikely, and that the DRV would eventually gain control of the entire country. They, in any event, had sound evidence that the GVN was unlikely to last out the two years before elections. It may well be, then, that the conciliatory posture of the Communist states at the conference can be explained by their presupposition that the specific terms of agreement were less important than the detente itself -- that their future successes, however slow in coming, were inevitable. Western reactions and expectations, on the other hand, were no doubt quite different. While France was interested in extricating itself from its military failure, it was no less interested in maintaining its cultural and economic position in Vietnam. Even the United Kingdom gave every indication that it wished to prevent a general Communist takeover. Hence, it would appear that these powers, like the U.S., wanted to stop the fighting, but not at the sacrifice of all of Vietnam to the Communists. Thus, the spirit of the Accords may have been much less significant than the letter of the Accords. In other words, by dividing the country at the 17th parallel, with each zone under a separate "civil administration," by providing for the regroupment of forces and the movement of people North and South, and by putting off elections for two years, the Geneva participants jeopardized, if not precluded, the unification of Vietnam. Whatever the parties intended, the practical effect of the specific terms of the Agreement was a permanently divided nation. (Tab 3)

## DISCUSSION

III. D. Tab 1 - The Outcome for the Communists

Tab 2 - The Outcome for the West

Tab 3 - The Spirit and the Practical Effect of Geneva



### III. D. 1. THE OUTCOME FOR THE COMMUNISTS

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### III. D. 1. THE OUTCOME FOR THE COMMUNISTS

#### 1. Major Communist Powers Achieve Their Objectives

To judge from the public commentaries of the communist delegation leaders -- Molotov and Chou -- China and the Soviet Union were satisfied with the outcome at Geneva. The final settlement seemed to meet most of their objectives, measured not simply in terms of their narrow interests in Indochina, but more broadly in terms of their global interests. The Viet Minh, however, accepted a settlement considerably at variance not only with their initial demands and their actual military control in Vietnam, but with their compromise position as well. Yet, even the Viet Minh appeared content with the results of Geneva. The reason -- the belief that time was on their side.

##### a. Communists See Complete Takeover as Inevitable

At the final plenary session on 21 July, the Soviet, Chinese, and North Vietnamese delegates agreed that the Accords, if properly implemented, would end hostilities and give the DRV a territorial base in the North. The stage would thus be set for general elections in Vietnam and produce the desired communist takeover. The political situation in South Vietnam was precarious. In addition, there was a multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to the central government of Bao Dai who continually relied on the French. The communists certainly had good cause for considering that South Vietnam could not cohere sufficiently within the two-year period prior to national elections, stipulated by the Final Declaration, to pose a viable alternative to the DRV. The communists had good reason to believe that a stable regime in the southern zone would never be formed; hence the DRV would assume control of the entire country almost by default.

##### b. Chinese Not Adverse to Permanent Partition

Interestingly, however, the Chinese accepted the notion that the Geneva Accords had, at least temporarily -- and perhaps permanently -- created two separate political entities. As early as June, Chou told Jean Chauvel that the Chinese recognized the existence of Viet Minh and Vietnamese governments. In talking of a final political settlement, Chou again stated that this should be achieved by direct negotiations between the two Vietnamese governments. 1/ So far as the CPR was concerned, partition meant not a simple division of administrative responsibility -- which is the implication of the Vietnam armistice provision (Article 14a) for the conduct of "civil administration" by the "parties" who were to regroup to the two zones -- but the establishment of governmental authority in North and South Vietnam. What still remains unclear, of course, is the permanency which Chou privately attached to that arrangement.



c. China Sees Creation of a Neutral Buffer Zone

Beyond Vietnam, the Chinese apparently believed that the final agreements would preclude the three Indochinese states from involvement in the American security system. When Chou communicated to Eden his concern about Laotian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian participation in a Southeast Asia treaty organization, the Foreign Secretary said he knew of no proposal for those States to join. 2/ The next day Eden told Molotov that a security pact in Southeast Asia was inevitable and completely in line with British policy; but he added that no consideration was being given to the inclusion of Cambodia and Laos (a comment which Smith regarded as a "mistake" inasmuch as the U.S. hoped to use the threat of their inclusion to get a better settlement). 3/ When the conference closed, the Chinese felt sufficiently assured about the matter, it would seem. On 23 July, a Chinese journalist confided: "We have won the first campaign for the neutralization of all Southeast Asia." 4/

d. China's Domestic Economy is Protected

China, at this time, was greatly concerned with her own internal problems, and anxious to consolidate at home before moving further into Asia. The Korean War had exacerbated the pressing economic and political problems within China, as had the attempts by Peking to push an economic reconstruction beyond the limits of possibility. The Chinese were satisfied that the Indochina situation after Geneva allowed, at least, temporary assurance that a major effort could be turned inward without fear of repercussions along China's southwestern border.

e. U.S. Threat of Massive Intervention is Forestalled

The USSR and China had watched warily the sporadic attempts of the U.S.; first, to keep the Indochina problem out of Geneva, and second, to gather the Western nations into united action to prevent communist consolidation of Indochina. There was an element of unpredictability concerning U.S. action in Southeast Asia, fostered purposely to a great extent by the U.S. and UK (with calculated moves such as the bilateral military talks in Washington), but also emphasized by the inordinate number and wide variety of public statements on Indochina that were made by official and semi-official Washington during the months of June and July, while the Geneva Conference sat. Peking and Moscow, then, had some reason to believe that they had pre-empted U.S. military moves by diplomacy.

f. Prospects of Short-Run Stability Please the Russians

The Soviet government was not dedicated to the furtherance of Chinese goals in Southeast Asia, nor did the USSR want to see an increase in U.S. influence in this area. For these reasons, it was greatly in the interest of the Soviets to press for the withdrawal of French power from Indochina -- but in a way calculated to inhibit any major increase in U.S. or Chinese power to replace the French. The creation, therefore,



of a neutral state in Vietnam (or even the creation of two opposed half-states) met the immediate requirements of the USSR in the best manner possible under the circumstances -- and it was the short-range solution that the Soviets, as well as the other delegations, were seeking at Geneva. The future would take care of itself.

g. Russians See Influence on French View of EDC

Whether or not the cause and effect relationship can be proved with any accuracy, the fact remains that the French did not ratify the EDC agreements when these were presented to the French Assembly a month after Geneva. The reaction in the USSR was described as "jubilant," hailing the French rejection as "an important event in the political history of Europe." 5/ This event, following closely on the termination of the Geneva Convention, was seen by the Soviets as, at least in part, influenced by the communist strategy of letting the French off the hook in Geneva.

2. The Major Communist Powers Perceive Certain Losses

a. Communist Consolidation of All of Indochina is Not Achieved

At least for the immediate future, a communist consolidation of all of Indochina was out of the question. Regardless of how inevitable the surge of communist control into the area might seem, the move had come to a halt temporarily at the 17th parallel. In effect, the communists were not prepared to take the risks in pursuing their very real superiority, if not on the battlefield, then in the psyche. The communist assertion at Geneva that the Viet Minh controlled three quarters of the area of Vietnam was close to the truth. The decision to relinquish this local control throughout Vietnam must have been viewed as a loss.

b. U.S. Influence in Indochina is Not Prevented

A major political and military objective of China was the prevention of U.S. bases in Southeast Asia. This aim, paralleling the Soviet objective of blocking U.S. influence in Europe, was an important part of overall Chinese strategy at Geneva. But, if the Chinese Government considered the Geneva provisions a first step toward Southeast Asia's neutralization, this estimate was quickly disabused. The governments of Laos and Cambodia issued declarations on 21 July, which left room for the conclusion of alliances and the stationing of foreign forces on their territory. To ease the communist outcry, both countries vowed not to ally themselves in any manner "not in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations," nor to permit foreign bases while their security was not threatened. 6/ Nevertheless, their delegates indicated even before the Conference that U.S. protection of their countries against aggression was desirable. The two zones of Vietnam, in contrast, were categorically enjoined from permitting the establishment of foreign military bases and from adhering to military alliances (Article 19 of the armistice agreement). The Chinese, because they were unable to obtain



a U.S. guarantee of the Accords, could not prevent the U.S. from subsequently bringing Cambodia and Laos within the security perimeter of SEATO through the Protocol, a device broached by Under Secretary Smith at Geneva. 7/ Later, the U.S. spread this umbrella over SVN as well.

### 3. The DRV Views Its Gains and Losses

#### a. Advantages are Gained, but at a Price

In terms of advantages, the military accords signed 21 July by Ta Quang Buu, Vice-Minister of National Defense of the DRV, and Brigadier General Delteil, Commander of French Union Forces in Indochina, ceded the DRV full control of all Vietnamese territory north of the line set roughly at the 17th parallel. French attempts to acquire enclaves in the area of the bishoprics and around Haiphong had been rejected, and all French forces were to be withdrawn from Haiphong within 300 days. Moreover, the Final Declaration of the Conference specified that the demarcation line was provisional and, under Article 7, would be expunged by elections to be held in July, 1956. The DRV, therefore, could look forward to a possible legal victory at the ballot boxes within two years.

But, the disappointments to the Viet Minh must have weighed heavily also. National unity was specifically compromised by the creation of two zones divided by a demilitarized area at the 17th, rather than the 13th or 14th, parallel. A fast political solution in six months had to be bargained away as well; elections would not be held for two years, and even then under international, not strictly Vietnamese, supervision. Finally, the Viet Minh had been forced to yield completely on their claims advanced in support of the Pathet Lao and Free Khmer forces. In Laos and Cambodia, as in Vietnam, international rather than indigenous inspection teams were to be admitted. The so-called resistance forces would either have to be withdrawn (in Laos, following temporary regroupment) or demobilized (in Cambodia) on the spot. The Viet Minh could only salvage promises from the governments of Laos and Cambodia -- contained in their separate declarations of 21 July -- that "citizens" of the two countries would be able to participate as candidates or electors in elections to be held during 1955. The Viet Minh accepted these results even though they went well beyond compromise positions which they advanced through the talks.

#### b. The DRV is Insured of Territorial Consolidation

The Viet Minh had no desire to surrender their de facto control over considerable areas of Vietnam outside the Tonkin Delta. During June and July, according to CIA maps, Viet Minh forces held down the larger portion of Annam (excepting the major port cities) and significant pockets in the Cochin-China delta. Their consequent claim to all the territory north of a line running northwest from the 13th to the 14th parallel (from Tuy Hoa on the coast through Pleiku to the Cambodian border) 8/ was far more in keeping with the actual military situation than the French demand.



for location of the partition line at the 18th parallel. Yet, the French would never consent to admitting communist control on the borders of both Cambodia and Laos. The final decision to partition the country at the 17th parallel was, nevertheless, a success to the extent that it provided the DRV with absolute, unchallenged political control of half of Vietnam -- a situation which the Viet Minh began then to view as the first crucial step in the series of political moves that would achieve goals commensurate with their military power: the quick political conquest ("liberation") of the rest of the country.

c. Election Plans Point to Eventual DRV Domination

In keeping with their desire for haste in achieving an "all-Vietnamese" political settlement, the Viet Minh, while agreeing to partition, wanted it to be temporary and to be followed quickly by elections. The Viet Minh delegates, therefore, had argued that elections should be held six months after a cease-fire. But, the French retorted elections should be held 18 months after completion of the regroupment process, or between 22 and 23 months after the cease-fire. 9/ The compromise, urged by the USSR and China, accomplished what was in fact the most important aim of the election talks: the fixing of a date, thus providing insurance that the elections would take place. In a very real sense, though, the two year lag gave the GVN invaluable time, and communist strategy on this issue seemed to have backfired.

4. The DRV is Satisfied with the Geneva Outcome

The Viet Minh evidently believed -- and no French authority on the spot doubted this -- that it had the capability to eliminate the French from Tonkin with one major offensive, and to drive on for further gains in the South against a weakened, demoralized Franco-Vietnamese army. Fighting and talking simultaneously was pointed to with approval by the Viet Minh as a tactic capable of being pursued for two years (like the Chinese in Korea) in order to assure greater territorial control. Whether the Viet Minh ultimately envisaged the conquest of all Vietnam before reaching agreement with the French is not known; but, like the French, the Viet Minh probably regarded maximum control of territory and population as insurance against future elections. Reporters covering the Geneva Convention quoted bitter comments of the DRV delegation after the final meeting, when the agreements were made public. There is good reason to believe, however, that, in reality, the Viet Minh were satisfied with the results attained at Geneva. This satisfaction was based in part on certain miscalculations on the part of the DRV, which underestimated the future commitment of the U.S. to the South Vietnamese and which also underestimated the survivability of Diem and his government. It is apparent that the DRV felt that its losses at Geneva amounted merely to delays that would set back the time schedules in Indochina, but that such a payment in time was well worth the territorial gains and the prevention of Western united action in Vietnam. Unlike GVN and U.S. statements during and after Geneva, Viet Minh representatives publicly supported both the military agreements and the Final Declaration without qualification.



### III. D. 1.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Dillon priority tel. No. 5035 from Paris, June 24, 1954 (TOP SECRET).
2. Smith tel. SECTO 636 from Geneva, July 17, 1954 (SECRET).
3. Smith NIACT tel. SECTO 639 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (SECRET).
4. CIA Memorandum RSS 0017/66, p. 46 (SECRET/NoFornDis/Controlled Dis).
5. Mackintosh, pp. 84-85.
6. The declarations may be found in Great Britain, Foreign Office, Documents Relating to British Involvement in the Indo-China Conflict 1945-1965, Misc. No. 25, Cmd. 2834 (London: H.M.S.O., 1965), pp. 76 (Cambodia) and 79 (Laos).
7. In a talk with the Cambodian Foreign Minister Sam Sary, Philip Bonsal suggested that it would not be possible to guarantee Cambodia's security by a Conference mechanism subject to communist veto. Bonsal said, however, that once a satisfactory cease-fire were concluded, one that did not prevent Cambodia from cooperating with other non-communist states in defense matters, "he was confident U.S. and other interested countries looked forward to discussing with Cambodian Government" the security problem. (Johnson priority tel. SECTO 627 from Geneva, July 16, 1954, SECRET.) When Sam Sary called a few days later on Smith in the company of Nong Kimny (Ambassador to Washington), the Under Secretary recommended that Phnom Penh, at the Conference, state its intention not to have foreign bases on its territory and not to enter into military alliances. At the same time, though, Cambodia would be free to import arms and to employ French military instructors and technicians. While Cambodia would thus perhaps not be free to join the contemplated SEATO, she might still benefit from it. Smith "assured the Cambodian Foreign Minister that, in our view, any aggression overt or covert against Cambodian territory would bring pact into operation even though Cambodia not a member. I took position that French Union membership afforded Cambodia adequate desirable means of securing through France necessary arms, some of which would be American, as well as necessary instructors and technicians, some of which might well be American trained." Nong Kimny "limited himself to statement that Cambodia relies heavily on U.S. for eventual protection against aggression and that Cambodia desires to emerge from current conference with maximum freedom of action re measures Cambodia may take to assure defense." Smith tel. SECTO 650 from Geneva, July 18, 1954 (CONFIDENTIAL).
8. See Chauvel's report in Johnson's priority tel. SECTO 553 from Geneva, July 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET). Also: Lacouture and Devillers, p. 238.
9. Dillon from Paris tel. No. 32, July 2, 1954 (TOP SECRET).

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### III. D. 2. THE OUTCOME FOR THE WEST

#### 1. U.K. Diplomacy is an Unqualified Success

##### a. British Prestige is Heightened

The diplomacy of the Geneva Conference can be viewed as a success for the co-chairmen -- the U.K. and the USSR. Although some have described Chou En-lai as the most influential delegate at Geneva, 1/ and though Molotov rightfully has been credited with a key role in the initiation of needed compromises, Anthony Eden's presence and leadership made a difference in the results of the conference and in Britain's world image. Eden repeatedly acted as an intermediary not only between the Communists and the West, but also among the U.S., France, and the GVN as well. He aided Molotov in seeing proposals for compromise through to agreements, but he was also capable of espousing and maintaining unyielding support for firm Western positions. In particular, he was able to keep the Soviets convinced that the U.K. would be at the side of the U.S. if Communist intransigence led to a stalemate at Geneva. One specific pay-off for the U.K. was Peking's agreement on 17 June (after four years of silence on the point) to exchange charges d'affaires with London.

##### b. Danger of a Wider War is Averted

Tensions at Geneva were high. The Viet Minh was forcing the initiative on the battlefield in Indochina, the French Government was unstable, and at that time it seemed to many that all of strategic Vietnam would fall into Communist hands. Convictions were strongly held by many that that fall was inevitable unless the West took some united military action, or unless the diplomacy of Geneva brought unsuspected agreement. The danger of a wider war was very real. The U.K. wanted to support France and the United States, but not at the price of British troops and money. London's goal was to terminate the war and reduce international tensions -- to do all this without acceding to a Communist victory, and without adversely affecting British interests in that area of the world. The U.K. managed to steer a course close to its goals despite the fact that the British public was against U.K. military involvement in Indochina. In the end, Eden was able to help avert the risks of a wider war and to bring the U.K. into SEATO -- presumably to help protect British gains at Geneva.

#### 2. For France, the Results are Better Than Expected

##### a. France is Extricated without Dishonor

The French, probably more than any other party to the conference, had cause for satisfaction. With cooperation from the other major powers, needless to say, the French found themselves a political beneficiary at

Geneva despite France's unstable domestic politics and its poor military posture in Indochina. The settlements at Geneva were respectable enough for the French Government to stay in power. If anything, the results of Geneva provided a greater measure of internal political cohesion than France had enjoyed in a number of years. It would have been very difficult for any French Government to continue the actual fighting in Indochina -- especially when it appeared to many that France was losing.

b. France Retains a Significant Foothold in Indochina

The results at Geneva also allowed France to hold on to something very tangible -- most of Indochina itself. The Viet Minh forces and auxiliaries in Cambodia and Laos were shunted aside, preserving paramount French influence in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Moreover, in South Vietnam the French maintained clear title to their military, cultural, and economic interests; in North Vietnam, they had some prospect of salvaging their investments.

As early as 26 June, France made it privately clear that its intention was to maintain a viable Vietnamese state in the south. Thus, when in late June the Franco-Viet Minh "underground" talks were elevated to direct discussions between Jean Chauvel and Pham Van Dong, the French gave as one of their objectives the hope of arriving at an equitable territorial settlement "which will assure the State of Vietnam a territory as solid as possible..." Although aware of possible violent GVN reaction against partition, the French considered that arrangement best for the GVN inasmuch as it would enable the country "to consolidate herself in such a fashion as to create in the face of the Viet Minh an authentically national and independent force." 2/ In agreeing to partition, the French Government, like Washington, was motivated in part by a desire to assure the State of Vietnam a defensible territory within which the Saigon regime could attempt to construct a stable authority competitive with the DRV.

3. GVN Achieves More Than Its Situation Warrants

Considering the fact that the newly independent State of Vietnam was still little more than a figurehead for French authority, that the French by far were carrying the burden of the fighting against the Viet Minh, and that the French and Vietnamese together were not doing well against the Viet Minh, the GVN received much more than they could have realistically expected from the Geneva Conference. Indeed, Geneva opened new opportunity to the GVN. Though territory had been lost, a way was gained for the establishment of governmental authority in the south. Only through consolidation of territory and regroupment of population could Bao Dai have hopes of being able to meet the challenges -- whether at the polls or militarily -- that the Viet Minh were sure to provide in the future. The GVN delegation at Geneva nonetheless took the view that the Accords were a sell-out to the Communists. While the Saigon Regime did not directly disavow these agreements in the sense that they



rejected them altogether, or hinted at their intention of ignoring them, it clearly put a special interpretation on the agreements. For example, the GVN made it plain from the beginning that it would not countenance unsupervised elections. Moreover, it refused to contemplate elections unless and until it could secure and govern all its territory. This position was advantageous for the GVN, because it gave the DRV incentive to avoid actions south of the 17th parallel which might disrupt the election time-table, or give the GVN an excuse for refusing to hold elections. Through the concessions of the Communist countries and the firmness of its Western Allies, the GVN had been given time to consolidate itself.

#### 4. U.S. Attitude on Geneva is Mixed

##### a. Initial U.S. Public View is Cautious

The U.S. viewed the Conference results with mixed emotions. Publicly, the American position was that the Accords represented the best that could have been obtained from a bad situation. The President, at a 21 July news conference, declined to criticize the Accords. He said they contain "features which we do not like, but a great deal depends on how they work in practice." He announced the U.S. intention to establish permanent missions in Laos and Cambodia, and said the U.S. was actively "pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that general area." 3/ Under Secretary Smith took the same line two days later. Denying that Geneva was another "Munich," Smith said: "I am . . . convinced that the results are the best that we could possibly have obtained in the circumstances," adding that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield." 4/ Finally, Secretary Dulles, also on 23 July, made a statement to the press oriented toward the future. Referring to "the loss in Northern Vietnam," Dulles expressed the hope that much would be learned from the experience toward preventing further Communist inroads in Asia. Two lessons could be culled, the Secretary observed. First, popular support was essential against Communist subversion; "the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions." Second, collective defense should precede an aggressive enemy move rather than occur as a reaction to it. A collective security system in Southeast Asia, he concluded, would check both outright aggression and subversion. 5/

##### b. Public and Private Reactions Vary

These initial public U.S. reactions to the Conference results were at considerable variance with what was being said within government councils. The fact that another piece of territory had been formally ceded to the Communists obviously weighed heavily on the Administration. When papers were drawn up for the National Security Council in August, the Geneva Conference was evaluated as a major defeat for Western

diplomacy and a potential disaster for U.S. security interests in the Far East. The Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) stated that the Final Declaration of the Conference "completed a major forward stride of Communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia. It, therefore, recorded a drastic defeat of key policies in NSC 5405 and a serious loss for the free world, the psychological and political effects of which will be felt throughout the Far East and around the globe." 6/ In a separate report, the NSC was somewhat more specific concerning the extent of the damage: the Communists acquired "an advance salient" in Vietnam for use in military and non-military ways; the U.S. lost prestige as a leader in Asia capable of stemming Communist expansion; the Communist peace line gained at America's expense; Communist military and political prestige was enhanced as the result of their ability to exploit unstable situations in Southeast Asian countries without resort to armed attack. 7/

c. U.S.-U.K. Seven-Point Program is Mostly Accomplished

The provisions of the Accords, however, should have furnished the U.S. grounds for some satisfaction. Comparing the U.S.-U.K. seven-point memorandum of 29 June with the final settlement nearly one month later, the Conference had very nearly satisfied the minimum U.S. objectives -- despite Washington's apprehension over faltering British or French support.

(1) The integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia were preserved, and Viet Minh forces were, in the main, withdrawn from those two countries.

(2) Southern Vietnam was retained (although without an enclave in the North), and the partition line was drawn somewhat south of Dong Hoi.

(3) Laos, Cambodia, and "retained" Vietnam were not prevented from forming "non-Communist regimes" (in the case of Vietnam, within the two-year pre-election period); nor were they expressly forbidden "to maintain adequate forces for internal security." Vietnam's right to import arms and other war materiel was, however, restricted to piece-by-piece replacement, and a ceiling was fixed on foreign military personnel at the number in the country at the War's close.

(4-5) Recalling Dulles' interpretation of 7 July that elections should "be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance," 8/ the Accords did not stipulate "political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control...[or] exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means." Although both Dulles and Mendes-France preferred that no date be set for the elections, the compromise two-year hiatus gave the Americans, the French, and the South Vietnamese a significant breathing spell. The



U.S. priority in the aftermath was accorded to programs designed to "give democratic elements best chance" through economic assistance and political support for South Vietnam. Elections, as Dulles indicated during the Conference, and as the OCB concurred in August, 9/ were agreeable to the U.S.; but they were two years away, and the primary task in the interim was seen as "to maintain a friendly non-Communist South Vietnam..."<sup>10/</sup> The corollary objective (stated by the NSC in August, 1954, and approved by the President) "to prevent a Communist victory through all-Vietnam elections,"<sup>11/</sup> then did not connote U.S. determination to subvert the Accords; rather, it appears to have meant that U.S. influence would aim at assuring that the communists would not gain an electoral victory through force, deceit, or other undemocratic methods.

(6) The Accords expressly provided for the transfer of individuals desiring to move from one zone to another.

(7) The Accords did seem, at the time, to have basically fulfilled the precondition of providing "effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement." Although the machinery would be the ICC's rather than the UN's, Under Secretary Smith noted that the ICC would have a veto power on important questions, would be composed of one genuine neutral (India) and one pro-Western government (Canada), and would be permitted full freedom of movement into demilitarized zones and frontier and coastal areas. Smith, on 19 July, gave this assessment:

"Taking everything into consideration, I strongly feel this is satisfactory and much better than we were able to obtain in Korea. French feel, and Eden and I agree, that with such composition built-in veto will work to our advantage. This setup is best French or anybody else could get, and I feel it is within spirit of point 7."<sup>12/</sup>

d. Smith States U.S. Position on Accords

The final statement by Under Secretary Smith, setting forth the U.S. position on the Accords, provides the only public measure of the U.S. commitment to them. At Smith's urging, Dulles agreed that the U.S. delegation could take note of the Final Declaration as well as of the military agreement. But, Smith was specifically instructed not to take note of paragraph 13 of the Final Declaration. That paragraph aimed at ensuring respect for the armistice accords in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam by declaring the conferees' agreement "to consult one another on any question which may be referred to them by the International Supervisory Commission..." Dulles felt that provision implied:

"...a multilateral engagement with communists which would be inconsistent with our basic approach and which

subsequently might enable Communist China to charge us with alleged violations of agreement to which it might claim both governments became parties. 13/

Aside from taking note of the three military armistice agreements and paragraphs 1 to 12 of the Final Declaration, Smith, in line with long-standing U.S. policy and his instructions of 16 July from Dulles, declared on the Government's behalf that the U.S. "will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the Accords. Moreover, the U.S. "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." Finally, Smith reiterated a U.S. policy declaration of 29 June 1954 positing U.S. support of UN supervision of free elections designed to reunify countries "now divided against their will..." Smith mentioned on this point that the U.S. could not associate with any arrangement that would hinder "its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future ..."



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### III. D. 3. THE SPIRIT AND PRACTICAL EFFECT OF GENEVA

#### 1. The Accords, in Theory, are Clearly Drawn

##### a. The Primary Objective of the Accords is a Cease-Fire

The Geneva Accords -- that is, the armistice agreements for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and the Final Declaration of the Conference -- were designed primarily to end hostilities and re-establish peace in Indochina, and secondarily to provide conditions conducive to the future independent political development of the three States of the region. The signed armistice agreements were military, the only exception being the Declaration of the Royal Khmer Government, included in the Cambodia armistice, guaranteeing the political rights of all its citizens. 1/ The unsigned Geneva Final Declaration deals with a political settlement, but in terms of future events -- elections to be held in Laos and Cambodia during 1955 as provided in their constitutions, and elections to reunify Vietnam following consultations within one year (by July, 1955), followed by a national plebiscite within two years (July, 1956). The goal for all of the powers at Geneva, both Western and Communist, was a cessation of the war on terms that would permit subsequent progress toward their disparate political objectives in Southeast Asia. All participants desired what might be termed a profitable suspension of the fighting: the Communists wanted an agreement providing time for reconsolidation, and also a political arrangement that would facilitate future expansion; the West was willing to barter, holding out partition and elections in exchange for disengagement of French forces, establishment of the GVN as a viable political organization, and consolidation of the non-Communist Southeast Asian nations in a collective defense arrangement against the further encroachments of Communism.

##### b. Key Provisions for Partition and Elections

In retrospect, the key political provisions were those that produced the partition of Vietnam, and promised elections within two years. A short summation of the 47 articles and 2 annexes of the "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam, July 20, 1954" signed only by the French and the DRV, follows below as a review of the final Geneva position to which, theoretically, all delegates agreed:

#### (1) Summary of the Cease-Fire Agreement

##### Article

1. DMZ established; "Peoples Army of Vietnam regroups north and French Union forces" south.
2. Regrouping to be completed in 300 days.
3. ICC to control joint waterways.



## Article

4. The regrouping zones to include territorial waters, islands.
5. DMZ to be evacuated within 25 days.
6. Crossing of provisional military demarcation line prohibited.
7. Unauthorized entry in DMZ prohibited.
8. Rules for civil administration of DMZ.
9. ICC to have freedom of movement.
10. Military commanders of both sides to order complete cease-fire.
11. Times for cease-fire; information on planned regrouping movements to be exchanged within 25 days of Agreement's entry into force.
12. Minefields and other obstacles to be removed; regrouping moves will avoid contact.
13. Provision for air corridors.
14. Political and administrative measures in the two regrouping zones: conduct of civil administration; rules for transfer of territorial control; prohibition of reprisals; freely permitted transfer of residence by civilians.
15. Details covering disengagement and withdrawals of forces; timing, prohibition of hostilities; of sabotage; movement schedules.
16. Troop reinforcement prohibited; rotation permitted.
17. Military materiel augmentation prohibited, applicable to aircraft, naval craft, vehicles, etc; normal replacement authorized under specific ICC supervisory procedures.
18. Establishment of new military bases prohibited.
19. Foreign military bases, alliances, and hostilities prohibited.
20. Points of entry for rotation established.
21. PW liberation within 30 days of cease-fire, to include all PW's and civilian internees.
22. Commanders to insure punishment of violators of these Agreements.

## Article

23. Graves registration information to be exchanged.
24. Both forces to respect DMZ, undertake no operations, engage in no "blockade of any kind in Viet-Nam"; definition of "territory."
25. Commanders to assist ICC.
26. Cost of ICC to be shared by both parties.
27. "The signatories of the present agreement and their successors in their functions shall be responsible for ensuring and observance and enforcement of the terms and provisions thereof"; Commanders to comply in full; procedural refinements permitted as necessary.
28. "Responsibility for the execution of the agreement of the cessation of hostilities shall rest with the parties."
29. ICC to insure control.
30. Joint Commission (JC) to be set up.
31. JC to have equal number from both sides.
32. President of the delegations to the JC shall hold General rank; joint sub-groups to be established by mutual agreement.
33. JC supervisory responsibilities: cease-fire, regroupment, observance of DMZ, liaison.
34. ICC to be Canada, India, and Poland; presided over by India.
35. ICC to set up mobile inspection teams; locations established.
36. ICC responsibilities: control movements, supervise DMZ, control release of PW's, supervise ports and airfields for replacements and nonreinforcement.
37. ICC to begin inspections as soon as possible.
38. Reporting procedures of ICC inspection teams.
39. ICC handling of violations.
40. ICC intermediates JC and parties.
41. Recommendation procedure for ICC.
42. ICC decisions relating to violations which might resume hostilities must be unanimous.



## Article

43. ICC to inform Geneva Conference members if a recommendation is refused.
44. ICC to be set up at the time of cease-fire.
45. ICC in Vietnam to cooperate with ICC in Laos, Cambodia.
46. ICC may progressively reduce its activities.
47. Provisions effective 2400 hours, 22 July 1954.

## Annexes

- I. Demarcation line.
- II. Delineation of Provisional Assembly Areas.

On 21 July, the day following the armistice agreements, the members of the Geneva Conference approved a Final Declaration (by voice vote, with the U.S. and GVN abstaining; a signed agreement was avoided in order not to emphasize U.S. refusal to approve). The declaration is essentially a comment on the armistice agreements, "taking note" and otherwise stressing certain key points. A summary of the declaration follows:

### (2) Summary of the Final Declaration

#### The Conference:

1. Takes note of cease-fire in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.
2. Expresses satisfaction in cease-fire agreements.
3. Takes note of planned 1955 elections in Cambodia and Laos.
4. Takes note of prohibition of introduction of additional troops and materiel into Vietnam, and of declarations of Cambodia and Laos not to request foreign aid "except for the purpose of effective defense of their territory."
5. Takes note of prohibition of foreign bases in Vietnam, and declarations by Cambodia and Laos that they will not participate in any military alliances "not in conformity with principles of the Charter of the United Nations."
6. Recognizes the "essential purpose" of the Vietnam agreements is the end of hostilities, and that the DMZ is in no way a political or territorial boundary; the political settlement of Vietnam to be achieved in the near future.

## The Conference:

7. Declares general elections should be held in July 1956, with mutual consultations to this end beginning on 20 July 1955.
8. Emphasizes the provision for free movement of civilians.
9. Cautions against reprisals.
10. Takes note of French agreement to withdraw troops from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam "at the request of the government concerned."
11. Takes note of French recognition of sovereignty of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
12. Agrees as a group to respect sovereignty of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam.
13. Agrees as a group to consult on questions presented by ICC.

## 2. Theoretical and Practical Interpretations Differ

### a. The Election Provision Causes Controversy

The most serious controversy over the Accords has centered on the election provisions (Article 7) of the Final Declaration. The Declaration obviously envisaged elections to decide on a united Vietnam to be held by July, 1956. Since "the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary," the Geneva partition was a temporary, expedient measure. The Conference intended then to permit the Vietnamese people "to enjoy the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by democratic institutions," and to devise a political settlement for their country "in the near future." That settlement, the conferees declared, ought to come about (1) "on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity" and (2) through "free general elections by secret ballot...in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the Member States of the International Supervisory Commission...Consultation will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards."

### b. Practical Views Vary

The difficulty with the election provisions of the Final Declaration, as with the Accords as a whole, relates not to their spirit, but to their practicality. It remains a matter of conjecture whether the members of the Convention genuinely thought that a political solution to



unification had been postponed by only two years, or whether they felt that partition, even with the resultant risk of renewed military confrontation, was, in reality, the best and only solution that the conflicting aims and pressures at Geneva could provide. The British, like the Russians, thought partition achieved their goal of re-establishing a stability, however precarious, in Southeast Asia. The Chinese did not gain as extensive a buffer zone as they had sought, but probably were satisfied to see the territorial establishment of the DRV; they could not (at that time) have been seriously concerned over a future threat from South Vietnam, since the Accords ruled out an extensive U.S. military presence there. The U.S. viewed the loss of North Vietnam as a political disaster, and immediately set about making treaty arrangements to prevent the loss of more Asian territory to Communism; but the U.S. was willing to accept partition as all that could be salvaged from a bad military situation. The Southeast Asia policy of the U.S. in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference was focused on organizing free Asian states against further inroads of Communism. The two Vietnams faced each other across a demilitarized zone. The DRV, manipulating a Viet Minh infrastructure in the South, waited for the elections, or for voracious political forces in the South to plunge the Saigon Government into chaos before election time arrived. South Vietnam began its attempt to establish complete control over its own countryside, and constantly decried the DRV's undemocratic handling of would-be migrants.

c. Official Positions are in Agreement

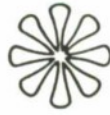
On the surface, however, the parties to the Geneva Accords -- with exception of the South Vietnamese Government -- officially subscribed to the view that partition was, as the Final Declaration stated, only temporary. Moreover, and again with the GVN the exception, all the parties concluded that partition was the only realistic way to separate the combatants, meet the widely divergent military and political demands of the French and Viet Minh, and conclude an armistice.

d. The Outcome Could Have Been Predicted

But such assertions did not affect the practical import of the Geneva documents. By creating two regimes responsible for "civil administration" (Article 14.a. of the Vietnam Armistice Agreement), by providing for the regroupment of forces to two zones and for the movement of persons to the zone of their choice, and by putting off national elections for two years, the conferees, whatever their intentions, made a future political settlement for Vietnam unlikely. The separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel was designed to facilitate the armistice, but in fact it also facilitated the development of two governments under inimical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems. Thus, reunification through elections remained as remote in Vietnam as in Korea or Germany. "Elections," as Victor Bator has

commented, 2/ "can, indeed, decide secondary problems of coexistence in circumstances where some measurable minimum basis for political agreement exists. But they are incapable of acceptance by two opposing states, or parts of a state, when diametrically opposite philosophies are involved." If the Geneva Accords were subverted, the subverters were the Geneva conferees themselves, who postulated an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam they themselves undertook on July 21, 1954.





# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV.A.1

NATO AND SEATO: A COMPARISON

SUMMARY

Because the SEATO Treaty has been used by the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations to justify U.S. policy, aid, and presence in Vietnam, and because many have questioned this justification, the treaty has become a center of controversy. The issue is whether by intent of the parties and by treaty terminology the U.S. was obligated to use force to help defend the territorial independence and integrity of South Vietnam. No one seriously challenges U.S. military and economic aid provisions under the SEATO Treaty; the thrust of the criticism is the use of U.S. ground combat forces.

There are plentiful statements over time by the U.S. Government on the importance of SEATO.

President Eisenhower stated: "We gave military and economic assistance to the Republic of Vietnam. We entered into a treaty -- the Southeast Asia Security Treaty -- which plainly warned that an armed attack against this area would endanger our own peace and safety and that we would act accordingly."

President Kennedy stated: "...The SEATO Pact...approved by the Senate with only, I think, two against it, under Article 4, stated that the United States recognized that aggression by means of armed attack against Vietnam would threaten our own peace and security. So since that time the United States has been assisting the government of Vietnam to maintain its independence...The attack on the government by communist forces, with assistance from the north, became of greater and greater concern to the Government of Vietnam and the Government of the United States."

Secretary Rusk, speaking for the Johnson Administration, made the strongest statement of all: "We have sent American forces to fight in the jungles...because South Viet-Nam has, under the language of the SEATO Treaty, been the victim of 'aggression by means of armed attack.' Those who challenge this rationale contend that unlike the NATO Treaty which specifically included the 'use of armed force' and unambiguously intended such action, the SEATO Treaty was not meant by its U.S. framers as an umbrella for American military intervention."

This is the kind of issue that can readily be argued either way. It is obvious the language of the SEATO Treaty allows the signatories the choice of military means. And, a respectable argument can be made for the further step of obligation. For example, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report on the treaty in 1954 stated:

"The committee is not impervious to the risks which this treaty entails. It fully appreciates that acceptance of these additional obligations commits the United States to a cause of action over a vast expanse of the Pacific. Yet these risks



are consistent with our own highest interests. There are greater hazards in not advising a potential enemy of what he can expect of us, and in failing to disabuse him of assumptions which might lead to a miscalculation of our intentions."

To the contrary, a statement before the Foreign Relations Committee by Secretary Dulles himself can be cited to demonstrate more modest, less obligatory designs:

"I might say in this connection, departing somewhat from order of my presentation, that it is not the policy of the United States to attempt to deter attack in this area by building up a local force capable itself of defense against an all-out attack by the Chinese Communists if it should occur. We do not expect to duplicate in this area the pattern of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its significant standing forces. That would require a diversion and commitment of strength which we do not think is either practical or desirable or necessary from the standpoint of the United States.

"We believe that our posture in that area should be one of having mobile striking power, and the ability to use that against the sources of aggression if it occurs. We believe that is more effective than if we tried to pin down American forces at the many points around the circumference of the Communist world in that area.

"It may very well be that other countries of the area will want to dedicate particular forces for the protection of the area under this treaty. But we made clear at Manila that it was not the intention of the United States to build up a large local force including, for example, United States ground troops for that area, but that we rely upon the deterrent power of our mobile striking force."

By looking into the words of the treaty in the light of its origins and the interests of the U.S. as perceived in 1954, and by comparing these with NATO language, origins, and development, it is possible to make a tentative judgment on the issue of obligation. Whereas it is clear that NATO was intended for deterrence against aggression and defense with U.S. forces should deterrence fail, SEATO seems to have been designed with a view only toward deterrence. Defense, especially with U.S. ground forces, was not seriously contemplated.

There are three pieces of evidence in support of this contentious conclusion: (1) the stringent preconditions which the U.S. delegation to the Manila Conference to establish SEATO were instructed to insist upon; (2) the lack of institutional and force structure development in SEATO as compared to NATO; and (3) the fact that SEATO and NATO treaty terminology differ in respect to the use of force and other matters.

Unlike the guidance under which U.S. negotiators helped to frame NATO, U.S. representatives to the conference establishing SEATO were given four uncompromisable pre-conditions:

(a) The U.S. would refuse to commit any U.S. forces unilaterally;

(b) Were military action to be required, one or more of the European signatories would have to participate;

(c) The U.S. intended to contribute only sea and air power, expecting that other signatories would provide ground forces;

(d) The U.S. would act only against communist aggression.

These instructions not only clearly exempt the use of U.S. ground forces, but presuppose multilateral action before the U.S. would act in any capacity.

With respect to the comparative development of SEATO and NATO, U.S. behavior also indicates great restraint and avoidance of commitment. NATO was formed in 1949, and within two years it was well institutionalized -- combined command forces in-being and a Standing Group for policy guidance. The U.S. consistently resisted the efforts of its SEATO partners for comparable institutions. Secretary Dulles, in fact, sought to discourage public identification of SEATO with NATO. Only in 1959, did the U.S. accede to the formation of a modest SEATO secretariat. Moreover, SEATO had to wait until 1960 before the U.S. would participate in the development of a series of SEATO contingency plans. Most important, no U.S. troops have ever been designated specifically for SEATO.

Comparing the specific terminology of the operative sections of the SEATO and NATO treaties gives additional credence to the non-obligation argument. The key articles of both treaties are those calling for action against an enemy threat. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty declares that the member nations "agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all," and that in that event each will take "forthwith...such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force...." The correlative phraseology in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty Article IV declares that "each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack against any of the Parties, or against any state or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional process." The SEATO wording is thus intentionally ambiguous on the point of just what response would be made by the members in the event of an armed attack. Such an attack against one of the SEATO members would be viewed as a "common danger" rather than as an "attack



on all." Where NATO prescribes action "forthwith," SEATO requires only that the "common danger" be "met" in accordance with "constitutional processes." SEATO also forecloses action on the treaty of any threatened state without the consent of that state -- a qualification designed to reassure members that their independence was not threatened by neo-colonialism or other domination in a SEATO guise.

In some respects, however, the SEATO Pact is broader than its NATO counterparts. The nature of the threat is loosely defined in Article IV as "any fact or situation that might endanger the peace of the area" and provision is made to protect threatened member countries of the region. The area of applicability is left flexible. Moreover, Article II of the SEATO Treaty applies the pact against not only "armed attack" but also "subversive activities directed from without against members territorial integrity and political stability." Also, unlike the North Atlantic Treaty, there is no clause in the SEATO Treaty implying a dependence on United Nations intervention to restore peace once the treaty were invoked.

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#### IV. A. 1. NATO and SEATO: A Comparison

##### 1. Genesis

###### a. Truman Doctrine, 1947

In 1946, Winston Churchill perceived a postwar threat in a wartime ally:

"Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its communist international organization intends to do...what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytizing tactics...From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent..." 1/

And he also depicted a counter:

"Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without...a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States..."

These insights were reinforced in early 1947 by influential analyses of George Kennan and others of Soviet motives and capabilities, which pointed out that occasional and sporadic efforts to foil Soviet policy were severely disadvantaged. These analysts held that the West should seek to oppose Soviet expansionism by what the Foreign Affairs "X" article of January, 1947, called "the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force." 2/ Such a strategy, it was held, would force the Soviet to reassess and adjust its policies, and the U.S. could expect eventually the "break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power." Out of these, and similar appreciations of Soviet intent emerged the concept of a U.S. strategy of involvement.

Theory was swiftly abetted by event. The British notified the U.S. that it would be unable to extend its economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey beyond March, 1947. The U.S., rather than accept the distinct possibility of a Soviet intrusion following British withdrawal, chose to take up the burden the British were laying down in the eastern Mediterranean. Congress authorized in May, 1947, some \$400 million for direct aid to those countries, acting upon the recommendation of President Truman in the March, 1947, message known since as the "Truman Doctrine":

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way..." 3/

The President went on to underscore the U.S. determination to commit its resources to contain communism, clearly subordinating military aid to



economic and political means. Finally:

"To insure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institution and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes."

b. Marshall Plan, 1947

The U.S. Secretary of State on June 5, 1947, proposed the cooperative international economic aid subsequently entitled the European Recovery Program (ERP), but known widely as the Marshall Plan. ERP was at first explicitly designed to permit and even attract Soviet cooperation:

"Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist." 4/

But the Soviet rebuffed the Marshall Plan, turned Bloc propaganda against it as an adjunct of the Truman Doctrine, and by so doing, bifurcated Europe. Moreover, among three top-level U.S. committees examining ways of bringing U.S. resources to bear on European recovery, the Committee on Foreign Aid (Harriman Committee) found that:

"The interest of the United States in Europe...cannot be measured simply in economic terms. It is also strategic and political. We all know that we are faced in the world today with two conflicting ideologies...Our position in the world has been based for at least a century on the existence in Europe of a number of strong states committed by tradition and inclination to the democratic concept..." 5/

The bipolar world had begun to emerge. In January, 1948, the British Foreign Secretary, following talks with the U.S. Secretary of State, proposed an alliance among the U.K., France, and the Benelux nations, referring to "the conception of the unity of Europe and the preservation of Europe as the heart of western civilization." 6/ At the end of February, 1948, western Europe was shocked by the fall of the Czechoslovakian government to a communist coup d'etat. In March, the British-proposed alliance was contracted as the Brussels Pact, a fifty-year treaty of collective defense and economic collaboration. U.S. approval was immediate; the President told Congress that:

"Its significance goes far beyond the actual terms of the agreement itself. It is a notable step in the direction of

unity in Europe...This development deserves our full support. I am confident the United States will, by appropriate means, extend to the free nations the support which the situation requires..." 7/

c. ERP and NATO, 1948-1949

On 1 April, 1948, the Soviets initiated the blockade of Berlin. In late April, the President called a conference of his senior advisers to consider the Soviet threat, as well as the possibility of communist fomented uprisings in France and Italy. John Foster Dulles, then State Department consultant, later reported that the conferees agreed that:

"...Only a decisive pronouncement by the United States would check the fear that was inspired by Moscow...[and that the U.S. should] proceed along the lines of a North Atlantic regional pact..."

Dulles also stated that Senator Vandenberg:

"...Felt that the Senate liked the idea of regional associations and would be disposed to approve in principle a further developing of such associations for collective defense." 8/

In May, 1948, Senator Vandenberg introduced a resolution adopted by the Senate on June 11, 1948, by a vote of 64 to 4, advising the Executive to undertake the:

"...Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in accordance with the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Charter [of the UN], association of the United States, by constitutional process, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security." 9/

The Department of State later explained to Congress that "the contents of this resolution...became our guide in the discussion and subsequent negotiations which led to the North Atlantic Pact." 10/

In June, 1948, Congress also passed the Economic Cooperation Act, establishing the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) to administer a program of foreign aid. The following month, armed with the Economic Cooperation Act and the Vandenberg Resolution, the U.S. opened exploratory talks on an alliance with the Brussels Pact members and Canada. Subsequently, the talks were broadened to include twelve nations. On April 4, 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed, and in late July ratified by the Senate. It entered into force August 24, 1949.



d. The China Aid Program

In the meantime, U.S. policy suffered a setback in Asia. A China Aid Program had been enacted by Congress in June, 1948, in the same omnibus foreign assistance legislation which authorized ERP and ECA. The China Aid Program met almost immediate failure, for Mao's armies spread unchecked over the China mainland, and by late 1949, the position of the Nationalists there was untenable. This "failure" of U.S. aid -- it was termed such by Congressional critics -- no less than the urgent situation in Europe figured in Congressional action on military assistance legislation placed before it in 1949. 11/

e. MDAP, 1949

In September 1949, the Soviets exploded their first nuclear device. On October 6, 1949, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, designed as a comprehensive law, providing a Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) through which U.S. arms, military equipment and training assistance might be provided for collective defense. In the first appropriations under MDAP, NATO countries received 76% of the total, and Greece and Turkey (not yet NATO members), 16%. 12/ But Korea and the Philippines received modest aid, and the legislators clearly intended the law to underwrite subsequent appropriations for collective security in Asia. The opening paragraph of the law not only supported NATO, but foreshadowed SEATO:

"An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the Defense and General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Military Assistance to Foreign Nations, Approved October 6, 1949.

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the 'Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949.'

"FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

"The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be used except in the common interest. The Congress hereby finds that the efforts of the United States and other countries to promote peace and security in furtherance of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations require additional measures of support based upon the principle of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid. These measures include the furnishing of military assistance essential to enable the United States and other nations dedicated to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter to participate effectively in arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in support of those purposes and principles. In furnishing such military assistance, it remains

the policy of the United States to continue to exert maximum efforts to obtain agreements to provide the United Nations with armed forces as contemplated in the Charter and agreements to achieve universal control of weapons of mass destruction and universal regulation and reduction of armaments, including armed forces, under adequate safeguards to protect complying nations against violation and evasion.

"The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence.

"The Congress recognizes that economic recovery is essential to international peace and security and must be given clear priority. The Congress also recognizes that the increased confidence of free peoples in their ability to resist direct or indirect aggression and to maintain internal security will advance such recovery and support political stability." 13/

#### f. Precursor Pacts in Asia

With the Nationalist evacuation to Formosa in November, 1949, an urgent situation developed in Asia that in ways paralleled the conditions that prompted formation of NATO. The rise of Mao's Peoples Republic of China (PRC) seemed to project the monolithic power of Soviet communism to the eastern shores of Asia, menacing the relatively small nations along China's periphery like the Russians threatened Western Europe. The Chinese parroted the Kremlin's aggressive announcements, participated in the assault on South Korea, and provided aid to Ho Chi Minh in Southeast Asia.

U.S. counteraction was forthcoming. By 1951, in an effort to bolster the defensive capabilities of the area, the U.S. had become a partner in five separate defense treaties in the region. Four bilateral arrangements linked the U.S. with Japan, South Korea, Nationalist China, and the Philippines, forming an arc around the periphery of Communist China. In addition, the ANZUS Treaty was signed in 1951, and the Five-Power Staff Agency (composed of Australia, New Zealand, France, UK, and US) was formed in 1953 "to facilitate coordination on problems in Southeast Asia." In 1954, John Foster Dulles recalled that:

"When I went out to the Pacific area in 1950 to begin the negotiations which resulted in the Japanese Peace Treaty and a series of security treaties, the original hope had been that we could have a fairly broad collective security arrangement. As it happened, it was not possible to do at that time, and we were content perforce with a series of treaties...But those treaties themselves indicated that we did not regard them as an end, but only as a beginning..." 14/



From 1949 through 1953 the National Security Council maintained the view that a broader regional defense pact or association should be initiated by the countries of the area. 15/ In the following 1950 exchange with Congressman Fulton, Secretary of State Acheson expressed Administration policy:

"MR. FULTON: May I read to the Secretary from the second paragraph of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act:

'The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and free peoples of the Far East, of a joint organization consistent with the Charter of the United Nations to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard the basic rights and liberties, and to protect their security and independence.'

"Now may I point out that is a bipartisan policy, because it was two Republicans and two Democrats on this committee who put that amendment in. My question then is to the Secretary and to the State Department, why, when this was passed clear back in 1949, October 6, has not the State Department taken steps to put into effect the declared bipartisan foreign policy of the Congress?"

"SECRETARY ACHESON: Mr. Fulton, I think it is important for you to really look at your own words. You said that the Congress expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and free peoples of the Far East of certain things. Now the President stated he favors that. On all occasions he has stated it and I have stated that that is the attitude of the Government of the United States. I should think that the President and I and the Congress are all agreed that the very important words are that this organization should be created by the free peoples of the Far East and not created by the United States. We are not calling these nations together and you never asked us to call these nations together and tell them they should create something. I know that your knowledge of the Far East is sufficient to lead you to conclude that if we did that it would have exactly the opposite effect of the one which you wish to achieve. The President of the Philippines has been going forward to accomplish this. We have stated to him, and publicly, that we are most sympathetic to this activity on his part, but it is most important that it should be a spontaneous Asian action." 16/

g. Indochina and United Action, 1954

In the spring of 1954, however, the deterioration of the French situation in Indochina caused a re-evaluation of U.S. policy on collective security in Asia and precipitated proposals by the U.S. to the French, the British and several other countries to establish some

kind of Southeast Asian coalition. On 6 April 1954, the NSC, asked to consider "appropriate action regarding Indochina and the need for U.S. military intervention," replied that the best alternative was a regional grouping with maximum Asian participation. 17/ On 13 May, the NSC looked to "avoid the loss of Indochina and to resolve the colonial problem by the creation of a regional grouping." 18/ Crisis transformed the U.S. position on a wide regional alliance from that of a potential joiner to that of an anxious organizer.

When the U.S. position changed, the pendulum swung far, producing not only the general concept of "united action," but also several specific plans for U.S.-allied intervention in Indochina in a variety of circumstances. Secretary Dulles approached the British and French directly with a plan in which a ten-nation coalition would confront communist expansion in Southeast Asia. On 12-14 April, Dulles visited London to get Eden's support for this plan, but was turned down. Eden thought it best to wait and see what could be accomplished at the Geneva Conference, then in preparation. Dulles did get what he thought was Eden's agreement to a plan for an ad hoc group of the same nations to meet and discuss plans for collective action in case it became necessary, and a public statement in favor of a broad Asian alliance.

Congressional reaction to the latter was immediate. The House Foreign Affairs Committee was at the time holding hearings, and promptly issued a statement endorsing the Dulles and Eden action, and citing the MDAP legislation. The following is from the Hearings:

"MR. VORYS. Now, could I read a paragraph from the text of the recent statement issued by Messrs. Dulles and Eden... this paragraph was what caught my attention this morning.  
[Reading:]

'Accordingly we are ready to take part with the other countries principally concerned in the examination of the possibility of establishing a collective defense within the framework of the charter of the United Nations Organization, to assure the peace, security, and freedom of Southeast Asia, in the western Pacific.'

"I have changed our proposed statement slightly.

'The Committee on Foreign Affairs notes with approval the statement issued in London on April 13, 1954, by the Secretary of State and the British Foreign Secretary which is in line with recommendations previously expressed by the Committee and Congress in 1949.'

"The second paragraph reads as follows:

'This paragraph was drafted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and incorporated in the original Mutual Defense Assistance



Act. A similar paragraph was incorporated in the Mutual Security Act of 1953 by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and passed by the House of Representatives. This language was left out of the act as finally passed because the committee of conference regarded the existing paragraph of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act as giving adequate expression of congressional policy." 19/

The U.S. moved immediately to assemble the ad hoc group Dulles had discussed with Eden, inviting representatives of some 10 nations to meet in Washington on 20 April. Two days before the meeting was to take place, the British announced they would be unable to attend. They had not realized, they said, that the meeting would take place so soon; and they had not been given the opportunity to pass on the conferees. 20/ The meeting was held anyway, but became a general briefing of the twenty nations comprising the allied side at the Geneva Conference.

In the meantime, other coalition plans were in the making. An early concept, the first of many to be advanced, provided a choice of two courses of action:

"The U.S. is prepared to join actively in two regional groupings. The first such grouping will include nations ready immediately to intervene in Indochina provided certain conditions are met. The second such grouping should be defined, with wider participation, to guarantee against communist aggression or subversion of all Southeast Asia with the exception of Indochina so long as active fighting continues." 21/

The first of these groupings was to contain the U.S., France, the Associated States of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines. The second was to be composed of "all countries who wish to join" including the Colombo Plan countries (Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Pakistan), Korea, and "perhaps" the Chinese Nationalists. The U.S. wished to avoid a "white man's party" 22/ in the formation of any regional group, but the powers able to contribute substantial military support to the plans were not Asian. Neither coalition materialized before Geneva.

The dramatic fall of Dien Bien Phu served notice to the world of French military impotence in Indochina. When the participants of the Indochina fighting moved to the conference table in April, 1954, the U.S., fresh from the bitter experience of Panmunjom, looked on the upcoming discussions apprehensively, fearing that the French tactical defeat presaged strategic disaster. At one time or another during the Geneva Conference, the U.S. considered: (1) merely urging the French to a greater effort, (2) assisting the French with material support in varying degrees, (3) intervening in conjunction with the British, (4) taking military action with all those prepared to do so, and (5) working out a long range South-east Asia alliance. None of these courses of action proved practicable. Nonetheless, the outcome of the Geneva Conference did catalyze SEATO. Within the councils of the U.S. Government, the concession of half of Vietnam to the communists was considered another retreat before communist expansion.



Secretary of State Dulles publicly drew two lessons from Geneva: (1) that popular support was essential to combat communist subversion, and (2) collective defense against aggression could not be devised after the aggression was in progress. 23/ He went on to assert that a collective security system in Southeast Asia could in the future check both outright aggression and subversion. The U.S. moved promptly to convene an international conference at Manila in late summer, 1954, to devise such a security system.

h. Manila Conference, 1954

The outlook at Manila, however, tended to be more retrospective than futuristic. Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and chief DOD representative in the U.S. delegation observed in his report that:

"...the Manila Conference convened following communist military achievements in Indochina and political and psychological successes at Geneva. Against this background the effort of the Manila Conference to construct a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific was directed in large measure to recovering from the psychological blow thus administered to the Free World. Much of what was said at the Conference bore witness to the preeminence of psychological objectives in the thinking of the participating States. In a real sense, the Treaty that emerged at Manila is a response to the Geneva Agreements." 24/

The task facing the conferees was formidable compared with that Atlantic planners had faced six years earlier. The Geneva reverse provided a small basis for common action. NATO had been created in a relatively uncomplicated political situation, in an atmosphere of understanding and common need, to meet an unambiguous threat. Moreover, the North Atlantic nations could build collective defense on an infrastructure of shared culture, political ideals, and interdependent economies. Commitments of the member nations could be clarified to stipulate standing forces, command structures, and roles in planning. The nations at Manila, on the other hand, confronted a complex of dilemmas. Anti-communism was no unifying force. Throughout the region, potential communist aggressors were likely to adopt causes of anti-colonialism, anti-traditionalism, racism, religion, or irredentism. Moreover, the conferees represented disparate cultures in countries scattered across the world. Of the eight nations present, only two were Asian; several nations whose location made them logical candidates for an Asian coalition chose not to attend.

The U.S. representatives at the Manila Conference in September, 1954, arrived with instructions to insist on a number of preconditions for U.S. military action in Southeast Asia. First, with its commitments in Europe, the U.S. would refuse to act unilaterally in Asia; further, any such action would have to involve not only Asian nations, but also major European partners. Moreover, the U.S. would not be prepared to commit ground troops into combat in Asia; other nations would do the ground



fighting under a cover of U.S. sea and air power. In addition, the U.S. defined the communist threat as the only real danger in the area; the U.S. did not want to be drawn into an alliance directed against any other sort of enemy, particularly desiring to avoid colonial conflicts. Hence, the U.S. sought to restrict the applicability of any U.S. commitment to a few specified nations especially vulnerable to communist aggression. Each of these two major U.S. qualifications -- the proscriptions against land forces, and emphasis on anti-communism -- created its own dilemmas, solutions to which proved to be elusive.

#### (1) Force Commitment

The resource -- political as well as military -- the U.S. was prepared to commit to SEATO was bound to constitute its principal strength. But the U.S., with its NATO commitments already a sizeable burden, was not prepared to pay the price of a strong coalition. In no sense was the U.S. prepared to commit itself to SEATO as it had to NATO. (It is interesting that Dulles was so concerned with avoiding a public identification of SEATO with NATO that he tried to have the new treaty called "MANPAC," for "Manila Pact." 25/ ) Rather, the U.S. searched for ways in which other nations would provide troops. But few nations in 1954 possessed the capability to field an army of significance within the SEATO region.

Vice Admiral Davis noted that:

"The United States was faced in this issue, I believe, with the dilemma of attempting to attain two objectives that were not completely compatible; on the one hand there was a desire to place the communists on notice as clearly as possible that further aggression on the area would meet with effective collective counter-action. Such unequivocal notification would tend to enhance the psychological effect of the Treaty on the Free World and the deterrent effect on the communists. Yet on the other hand, in spite of the greater psychological effect that a strongly worded Treaty might have, the attainment of this objective was necessarily limited by the extent to which the United States, in its own interest, could undertake advance military commitments under the Treaty in restriction of its freedom of action." 26/

While the U.S. continued to call the prospective pact "regional," a region existed only in the sense that a certain geographical area was considered to be threatened by the expansion of communism. The membership solicited for the SEATO conference was worldwide; potential force contributors were overbalanced on the European side; and even within the region itself, several countries did not desire to become participants, and others were not invited. Determined not to become enmeshed in Southeast Asia without help from Europe, the U.S. settled for a SEATO based on unspecified forces from eight nations, five of which were ethnically European -- a position which apparently dismissed from consideration the disadvantages which would accrue to armies drawn from former metropole nations.

Several of the states at Manila were acutely disappointed at the reluctance of the U.S. to place its military forces at the disposal of the pact; they were expecting a NATO-like commitment and they were surprised when it was not forthcoming. Admiral Davis reported that:

"With respect to the military aspects of the Treaty, most of the participating States, notably the Philippines and Thailand, urged provisions that would explicitly commit the Treaty Parties to take military action in event of aggression in the Treaty area. The commitment of the United States to such action, of course, was the purpose of these urgings. Much was said about the desirability of the NATO as opposed to the allegedly weaker ANZUS formula. Most of the participating States argued that explicit commitments to take action were necessary if the Treaty was to have the desired deterrent effect on the communists." 27/

But the U.S. delegates maintained their opposition, arguing that the U.S. had to retain its freedom of action, and could not accept a treaty commitment that was inconsistent with Constitutional requirements, and therefore prejudicial to ratification of the treaty by the Senate.

## (2) Anti-Communism

At the beginning of the Manila Conference, the U.S. served notice that it looked on the future SEATO agreement as an anti-communist pact, and that it would react only against a communist threat. The U.S. agreed to "consult" with the other members to decide future action, if faced with a non-communist threat. This, of course, had the effect of emphasizing once again the qualified nature of the U.S. commitment: the strongest power in the pact reserved the right to opt out of contingencies. Other nations present at Manila saw many other threats to regional peace, some of which seemed to them a good deal more dangerous than communism (e.g. Indonesian relations with Malaya, and Indian relations with Pakistan). There was, as a result, some hesitance to look on the pact as a mutual banding together against all dangers. Few missed the irony of the U.S. being the chief advocate of the SEATO pact, and also its prime qualifier. 28/

## 2. The Treaties Compared

Although Secretary of State Dulles wished to avoid comparisons of SEATO with NATO, such were inevitable. Similarities were in fact intended by many of the Manila Conferees, and emerged in the wording of the treaties. All the delegations at Manila, the U.S. included, took pains with treaty terminology, calculating carefully the effect it would have on their own domestic politics, as well as on the communist countries. As Admiral Davis reported:

"The Treaty is a document that speaks to many audiences; it supports self-determination of peoples, self-government and independence in deference to Asian nationalism; it provides for economic and technical cooperation as an inducement to present



Asian 'neutralist' countries to associate themselves with the Treaty; it permits the accession of other states, thus avoiding the charge that the Treaty members form an exclusive club with aggressive designs 'against' other States;...These elements of the Treaty attest to the importance the member States place on the effect of the document upon their respective publics...The success that the Treaty may have in enhancing the defense of the area will therefore have to be judged in light of the fact that it has psychological and economic as well as military objectives." 29/

a. Introductory Articles Alike

The initial article of both treaties is the same, word for word.\* The member nations promise not to use force in any manner inconsistent with the principles of the United Nations. Article 2 of NATO conforms to Article III of SEATO: an undertaking to strengthen free institutions and promote economic progress, and is identical except for specific mention in SEATO of technical assistance and promotion of social well-being, wording which is not in the NATO version. The reversal of the order of presentation of the second and third articles is interesting. In NATO, the article committing the members to strengthen free institutions precedes the article on developing collective capacity to resist attack. The order is changed in SEATO, perhaps emphasizing defense over other considerations. Article 3 of NATO corresponds to Article II of SEATO: an expression of resolve to develop a collective capacity to resist armed attack. There is, however, a significant difference in the SEATO article with the addition of a clause applying the Treaty specifically to subversion. This clause, in combination with the provision of SEATO Article IV that the parties shall consult immediately on measures of common defense if threatened by other than armed attack, places subversive aggression, in the form of externally fomented or supported insurgency, or coup d'etat, within the purview of the treaty.

b. The Key Articles

Central to analysis of the two treaties is comparison of the articles calling for action to meet an enemy threat. These are Articles 4 and 5 of the NATO Treaty, and Article IV of the SEATO Treaty. In general, the SEATO article has come under heavy criticism for lack of forcefulness. As presented below, the SEATO article has been transposed to parallel the two articles of NATO, but no words have been added or deleted.

NATO Art. 4 & 5

The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity,

SEATO Art. IV

If, in the opinion of any of the parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or

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\*Appendix A, Comparison of the Wording of the NATO and SEATO Treaties

NATO Art. 4 & 5

political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

The Parties agree that an armed attack

against one or more of them

in Europe or North America

shall be considered an attack against them all

and consequently they agree that

if such an armed attack occurs, each of them

in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations

will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties

such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force.

to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic Area.

SEATO Art. IV

the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the Treaty Area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.

Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack

against any of the Parties or against any state or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate

In the Treaty area

would endanger its own peace and safety

and agrees that

it will in that event

act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes



NATO Art. 4 & 5

any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council.

Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

SEATO Art. IV

measures under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations

It is understood that no action on the territory of any state designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned.

As the American delegation at Manila noted, the SEATO Article IV was in line with the wording used in the U.S., Philippine, Korean, and ANZUS pacts. The issue of precommitment to react to armed attack was side-stepped:

"Secretary Dulles pointed out during the conference that the wording of the North Atlantic Treaty, which speaks of an attack on one as an attack on all, nevertheless provides that the Parties will act in accordance with their constitutional processes. He persuaded the Conference that the final agreed wording of Article IV would be better received by the Senate, should tend to minimize debate, and would facilitate ratification by the United States." 30/

The SEATO Treaty wording is thus intentionally ambiguous on the point of just what response would be made by the members in the event of an armed attack. Such an attack against one of the SEATO members would be viewed as a "common danger" rather than as an "attack on all." Where the NATO Treaty notes that action taken "forthwith" might include the "use of armed force," the SEATO Treaty states merely that "common danger" would be "met" in accordance with "constitutional processes." SEATO also makes the provision that no action shall be taken on the territory of any threatened state without the consent of that state, a qualification necessary to reassure small-country members that their independence was not threatened by neocolonialism or other domination, and recognition of one of the most significant differences in the environment of the two treaty organizations.

In some respects, nevertheless, Article IV of the SEATO Treaty is broader than its NATO counterparts. The nature of the threat is loosely

defined as "any fact or situation that might endanger the peace of the area," and provision is made to respond to threatened countries that are non-members of the pact. In addition, there is no clause implying dependence on the Security Council of the UN to step in to "restore and maintain international peace and security," as there is in the NATO Treaty. Yet, the main point evident is that both the wording of NATO and that of SEATO provide the basis for a strong defensive strategy or, indeed, would admit of a weak one. There is enough room for interpretation under the SEATO Treaty for membersto devise all the defensive protection that NATO offers, and more.

c. Extent of the Treaty Areas

NATO Article 6 is the equivalent of SEATO Article VIII, dealing with definition of the treaty area. Both are broad, but the SEATO article is the more flexible of the two. In SEATO the area is limited on the north at latitude 21 degrees, 30 minutes, thus eliminating Formosa, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. The rest of the area is defined only as "the general area of South-East Asia" and "the general area of the South-West Pacific." The area, the treaty notes, can be modified at any time by unanimous agreement. The phrase that permitted inclusion of "the entire territories of the Asian parties" was noted by the U.S. delegation as having the advantage of bringing in West Pakistan "under the protection of the Treaty even though it is not in Southeast Asia." 31/

d. UN and Other Pacts

Except for a change in two or three unimportant words, NATO 7 and 8 are summed up and repeated in SEATO VI; these articles declare that agreements between SEATO members and the UN, or by members with other countries are not, nor will be, in conflict with SEATO responsibilities.

e. Treaty Institutions

NATO 9 and SEATO V establish a council for military and other planning. In the NATO Treaty this council is authorized to set up "subsidiary bodies," while in the SEATO Treaty such authorization is not given. This was a disappointment to several of the delegations at the Manila Conference. The Australians came forward with a request for a strong organization, but the U.S. delegation was able to persuade them to accept a modification of their proposal, substituting a concept of "consultation":

"During the sessions of the Working Group it became evident that some countries would propose wording calling for the establishment of military machinery, possibly along NATO lines. Recalling the position of [the U.S. State] Department that military participation should be consultative along lines of the ANZUS arrangement rather than permanent and formal as in NATO, the Defense Representative...proposed that consideration be given to the inclusion of the following wording after the first sentence of Article IV:  
'To this end the Parties to the Treaty will consult with regard



to military planning as required by the situation in the area.' Shortly thereafter the Australian delegation proposed the following addition to Article V: 'The Council shall set up such subsidiary machinery as may be necessary to achieve the military and other objectives of the Treaty.' Since the Australian proposal involved an open ended commitment, this Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed it and accepted the wording suggested by the Defense Representative. The Department of State agreed, and instructed the U.S. Delegation to support incorporation of this wording in Article IV." 32/

Secretary Dulles was able to bring about deletion of the references to periodic or regular consultation that had been introduced into the draft treaty.

f. Treaty Longevity

The final NATO articles (11-14) are administrative, covering ratification of the treaty, the length of time it is to remain in force, provisions for review of the articles, and archival responsibilities. These are paralleled in SEATO articles IX-XI. The NATO Treaty provides for withdrawal of its members after 1969; members are to give a year's notice prior to such action. The SEATO Treaty is to remain in force indefinitely, but members also may withdraw on one year's notice.

g. The Appended U.S. "Understanding"

Throughout the discussions at Manila the U.S. insisted that the focus of the pact be on the prevention of further communist expansion in the treaty area. When the other nations would not acquiesce to a wording of the treaty to make anti-communism its specific objective, the U.S. requested that an "understanding" be appended to the treaty. This was a U.S. unilateral statement of intent -- a qualifier upon the first paragraph of Article IV., in which the members agreed that in the event of aggression they will "act to meet the common danger in accordance with constitutional processes." The U.S. in the understanding restricts the applicability of its agreement to act, stating that only communist aggression will be recognized as warranting immediate response. In the event of other kinds of aggression, the U.S. would consult with the other member nations. Admiral Davis reported disagreement over this point at the conference:

"All participating States except the United States supported exclusion of the word 'Communist' from the Treaty. The U.S. draft originally referred to 'Communist aggression' in the preamble and in Article IV. The chief reason advanced by the other signatories for the deletion was the desire of most of the Parties that the Treaty cover any kind of aggression in the area. Pakistan, for example, wished that the Treaty would apply to possible aggression by India. The United States position was that the United States could not properly say that any aggression in Southeast Asia would endanger its own peace and safety, and that it could accept the

obligations of Article IV only in respect to Communist aggression. For this reason, the United States attached an 'understanding' to the Treaty in this sense. All other participants accepted the Treaty with the U.S. 'understanding.'" 33/

In the "understanding" the U.S. further complicated the matter by changing "aggression by means of armed attack" of Article IV to "aggression and armed attack"; in the same sentence, the understanding uses "aggression or armed attack" to refer to paragraph 2 of Article IV, which in fact is worded "threatened in any way other than by armed attack." The admixture of terms accentuates one of the major difficulties of the alliance: the governments of the SEATO treaty area were threatened by a complicated variety of destructive movements that might be called aggression against a member state. The appellation could be fitted in anywhere between "armed attack" and "fact or situation which might endanger the peace." The U.S. insistence on this point of "understanding" was probably superfluous. The latitude that the U.S. wanted already was built into the treaty, in Article IV. The emphatic nature of such an appendix to the treaty may have been calculated as a way to call the attention of the world to a powerful U.S. stand against further encroachments of communism. Such a call would have been consistent with the U.S. feeling of a necessity to re-establish a psychological position in the face of the "defeats" of Geneva. Nevertheless, the confirmation of U.S. single-mindedness that made a communist threat the only valid call for immediate response narrowed SEATO at its inception.

#### h. The Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia Protocol

The final item of the SEATO Treaty is a "protocol," which states unanimous agreement among the members to include Cambodia, Laos, and "the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam" under the protection of Articles III and IV of the Treaty. In other words, these countries, without actually becoming members of the pact, would be entitled to "economic measures including technical assistance" and also to defense against any attack, overt or not, from without or within. The U.S. had wanted to include these countries in SEATO, but membership might have seemed legally a contravention of the Geneva Agreements. At Geneva, Laos had not signed any agreement prejudicial to such a pact, but the Laotian Government, on the final day of that conference, had made the following declaration:

"The Royal Government of Laos will never join in any agreement with other states if this agreement includes the obligation for the Royal Government of Laos to participate in a military alliance not in conformity with the principles of the United Nations or with the principles of the Geneva Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities..." 34/

South Vietnam, on the other hand, was coextensive with one of the "zones" described in Article 19 of the armistice, which specifies:



"The two Parties shall ensure that the zones assigned to them do not adhere to any military alliance and are not used for the resumption of hostilities or to further an aggressive policy." 35/

France -- one of the "Parties" to the armistice -- was thus not in a position to admit the GVN to SEATO. However, nothing in the Geneva Accords appeared to exclude all three countries from being extended protection under such a pact without member status. 36/ This was pointed out by the French delegation:

"At French suggestion specific reference to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam was removed from the text of the Treaty, but these States are covered by the provisions of the Treaty in a separate protocol...The French felt that this method of extending the application of the Treaty to the Associated States was less likely to be construed as a violation of the spirit of the Geneva Agreements." 37/

At the conclusion of the Manila Conference, Admiral Davis wrote:

"I believe the Manila Conference accomplished the objective expected of it from the United States point of view. In my judgment our Defense representation in the U.S. Delegation succeeded in its efforts to insure that the Treaty is consistent in its military implications with the positions taken by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by this Department." 38/

The U.S. had, in effect, made a public statement of its intent to counter further communist moves in SEA, but left vague the specifics of its response. The pact, as intended, was fundamentally "consultative." There was to be no unified command, no bases, and no contribution of forces to a standing group; the U.S. accepted these lacks, and stressed the psychological gains of merely bringing a treaty into existence, pointing out that SEATO opened the way to a stronger and more all-encompassing defense of Southeast Asia than had theretofore been possible.

### 3. Evolution of the Treaty Organization

#### a. NATO Develops Rapidly

NATO rapidly acquired institutions.\* The treaty entered into force in August, 1949. By September, a Military Committee, a Standing Group, and the Regional Planning Groups had been created. By November a Financial and Economic Board and a Military Production and Supply Board had been set up. By December agreement had been reached on a strategic concept for the integrated defense of the NATO area. A year later a centralized command and control structure was formulated, becoming operational as SHAPE on 2 April 1951, with headquarters in the old Hotel Astoria, in Paris. Spurred on by the events occurring in Korea, NATO was further simplified and streamlined in the Ottawa meeting of September 1951, where a Temporary Council Committee chaired by W. Averell Harriman was set up. This became a permanent council, in March, 1952, a month after the accession of Greece and Turkey to the pact. 39/ In the wake of a major setback when the French Assembly refused to ratify the European Defense Community (EDC) proposal in August, 1954, the Paris Agreements were pushed through in October, providing for the accession of West Germany to NATO, and the establishment of a combined field command.\*\* Early in 1956 the NATO Council appointed a Committee of Three Ministers (Martino of Italy, Lange of Norway, and Pearson of Canada) to study ways that further cooperation could be achieved within NATO. The report of this Committee was approved by the Council on 14 December, 1956. Consultation within NATO was to become "an integral part of the making of national policy." 40/ The meeting of 16-19 December 1957 of the NATO Council included the heads of government, with Eisenhower and Macmillan participating. This meeting symbolized the significance which all the NATO countries attached to the pact -- and it was this sense of meaningfulness, commonality, and necessity, more than the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty, that accounted for the rapid organizational growth.

#### b. SEATO Unstructured by U.S. Preference

The Manila Conference eventuated in a pact termed the "Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and Protocol Thereto, September 8, 1954"; the treaty was ratified by the U.S. Senate by a vote of 82 to 1, and entered into force on February 19, 1955. 41/ The history of the development of SEATO thereafter is quite different from NATO's, since the initial policy of the U.S. was to discourage, rather than to assist, the evolution of a permanent structure. SEATO military staff

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\* Appendix B, Organizational Charts

\*\* In the same month -- October, 1954 -- the Warsaw Pact came into being.



consultations were held frequently, but were attended by relatively low-ranking U.S. officers, carefully instructed on limits of their planning flexibility. At the SEATO conference in Bangkok in February 1955, the U.S. position on military arrangements under the pact was to avoid discussion of permanent formal organization. A Defense Department memorandum on the U.S. stance again recommended that the ANZUS pact be used as a model:

"The U.S. desires to make no commitments of U.S. forces for use under the Manila pact. (This view has not been conveyed to the other powers.)

"With regard to military machinery for the coordination of measures to combat overt aggression, the U.S. is opposed to the establishment of formal military machinery or of a permanent SEATO staff. Instead, the U.S. supports the establishment of military advisors, who would meet periodically, formulate their own rules of procedure and any necessary organizational arrangements, designate planning assistants to work on specified projects, and insure that military planning activities are coordinated with those designed to counter subversive activities.

"While not explicitly so stated, the U.S. position is one of confining its activities and commitments to the scope of those made under the ANZUS Pact. Such apparent concessions to the other powers as have been made in the Working Group papers do not alter the fact that the U.S. is unwilling to commit any forces to the defense of Southeast Asia, opposes any military organizational arrangement which would require the integration of U.S. and allied war plans, and prefers to deal with its allies bilaterally rather than multilaterally."  
42/ [Emphasis added]

The U.S., although it refused to become deeply committed in advance to a military organization styled along NATO lines, was well aware of the necessity to be prepared to fight in the SEATO area. U.S. unilateral plans and preparations had been set in motion when, in January, 1955, the Secretary of Defense requested the JCS to provide "a concept of the possible application of U.S. military power in the implementation of Article IV of the Manila Pact" under two different assumptions: (1) prohibition of nuclear weapons; (2) permission to employ nuclear weapons. Requirements were established for:

"1. Broad outline plans for U.S. action...to deter or counter overt aggression by Communist China or, where applicable, by Viet Minh, against each of the Southeast Asian nations which are parties to the Manila Pact or against the free areas of Indochina which might be covered by the Pact. [Emphasis added]

"2. ...a statement as to the readiness capability of U.S. armed forces, in the next few years, to conduct operations in implementation of Article IV, 1, of the Manila Pact." 43/

The U.S. forces would constitute a "mobile reserve" ready for commitment to the treaty area, but the U.S. would enter no fixed agreement as to what those forces might be, or under what circumstances they would be used. Despite this unilateral planning, however, instructions for the delegates to the Bangkok conference indicated that planning for or creation of combined commands were not to be considered within the scope of the SEATO Pact. Suppression of guerrillas was to be handled by "indigenous forces only" unless these proved incapable of coping with the problem.

At the 1955 Bangkok Conference the Australians and New Zealanders repeated their willingness to make troop commitments to a SEATO force, but the U.S. representatives, following instructions, evaded discussion of the subject. 44/ The pressures on the U.S. team were strong, and the members came away with the conviction that the major factor "to contend with" in future meetings was bound to be

"...the obvious desire of the Asian nations to establish a NATO-type SEATO organization with everything that it implies in the nature of force commitments." 45/

Later in 1955, U.S. planners once more were approached by counterparts of several other countries with the proposal that, as a step toward some kind of SEATO standing group, a small secretariat be set up to study methods of creating a "possible future organizational structure." The report of the U.S. representatives stated, "The establishment of such an ad hoc arrangement should not prejudice the eventual creation or evolution of a standing group...should the need become necessary because of inadequacies revealed by experience." 46/ The JCS commented:

"The Joint Chiefs of Staff have no objection to the establishment of a small permanent secretariat, which would be an instrument of the Military Advisers and subordinate planning committees. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not agree to the possible evolution of such a secretariat into an organization of a standing nature...." 47/

This was the same point of view expressed by CINCPAC, who noted with apparent relief that:

"The recognition of the requirement for a small permanent secretariat has definitely forestalled for the foreseeable future any determined insistence for either a permanent staff planners organization, a standing group, or a combined staff." 48/



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## A COMPARISON OF THE WORDING OF THE NATO AND SEATO TREATIES

### NOTES:

1. In this layout, sections of the SEATO Treaty are transposed for comparison with like sections of the NATO Treaty. No words have been omitted.
2. Significant passages pointing out differences are underlined.
3. Comments are in brackets.

### NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY Washington, D.C., 4 April 1949\*

### SEATO TREATY

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all Governments.

They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.

They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security.

They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty:

The Parties to this Treaty,

Recognizing the sovereign equality of all the Parties,

Reiterating their faith in the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments,

Reaffirming that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, they uphold the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and declaring that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose peoples desire it and are able to undertake its responsibilities,

Desiring to strengthen the fabric of peace and freedom and to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and to promote the economic well-being and development of all peoples in the Treaty Area,

\* Effective 24 August 1949



Intending to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that any potential aggressor will appreciate that the Parties stand together in the area, and,

Desiring further to co-ordinate their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security,

Therefore agree as follows:

#### ARTICLE 1

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

#### ARTICLE 2

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

#### ARTICLE I

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

#### ARTICLE III

The Parties undertake to strengthen their free institutions and to co-operate with one another in the further development of economic measures, including technical assistance, designed both to promote economic progress and social well-being and to further the individual and collective efforts of governments toward these ends.

[The SEATO Treaty places more stress on technical assistance and social well-being; reversal of the order of the second and third articles places emphasis on collective defense.]

### ARTICLE 3

In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

### ARTICLE 4

The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

### ARTICLE 5

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each

### ARTICLE II

In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity and to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without against their territorial integrity and political stability.

[The SEATO Treaty adds subversion as a contingency.]

### ARTICLE IV

2. If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the Treaty Area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.

[The SEATO Treaty expands upon the word "threatened."]

1. Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the Treaty Area against any of the Parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would



of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

["Armed force" is not specifically mentioned in the SEATO Treaty.]

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

[This requirement is not in the SEATO Treaty.]

#### ARTICLE 6\*

For the purpose of Article 5, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack:

\* As amended by Article 2 of the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of Greece and Turkey.

endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.

[The SEATO Treaty specifically covers non-members -- "any state" -- this is not specific in the NATO Treaty.]

3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any State designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this Article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned.

[This understanding is not specific in the NATO Treaty.]

#### ARTICLE VIII

As used in this Treaty, the "Treaty Area" is the general area of South-East Asia, including also the entire

on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France\*\* on the territory of Turkey or on the islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer;

on the forces, vessels, or aircraft of any of the Parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the Parties were stationed on the date when the Treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.

#### ARTICLE 7

This Treaty does not affect, and shall not be interpreted as affecting, in any way the rights and obligations under the Charter of the Parties which are members of the United Nations, or the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

#### ARTICLE 8

Each Party declares that none of the international engagements now in force

territories of the Asian Parties, and the general area of the South-West Pacific not including the Pacific area north of 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude. The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, amend this Article to include within the Treaty Area the territory of any State acceding to this Treaty in accordance with Article VII or otherwise to change the Treaty Area.

[This emphasis on flexibility of application is not in the NATO Treaty.]

#### ARTICLE VI

This Treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations of any of the Parties under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. Each Party declares that none of the international engagements now in force between it and any other of the Parties or any third party is in conflict with the provisions of this Treaty, and undertakes not to enter into any international engagement in conflict with this Treaty.

\*\* On 16th January, 1963, the French Representative made a statement to the North Atlantic Council on the effects of the independence of Algeria on certain aspects of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Council noted that insofar as the former Algerian Departments of France were concerned the relevant clauses of this Treaty had become inapplicable as from 3rd July, 1962.



between it and any other of the Parties or any third State is in conflict with the provisions of this Treaty, and undertakes not to enter into any international engagement in conflict with this Treaty.

#### ARTICLE 9

The Parties hereby establish a council, on which each of them shall be represented to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty. The Council shall be so organized as to be able to meet promptly at any time. The Council shall set up such subsidiary bodies as may be necessary; in particular it shall establish immediately a defense committee which shall recommend measures for the implementation of Articles 3 and 5.

#### ARTICLE 10

The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.

#### ARTICLE 11

This Treaty shall be ratified and its provisions carried out by the Parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited

#### ARTICLE V

The Parties hereby establish a Council, on which each of them shall be represented, to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty. The Council shall provide for consultation with regard to military and any other planning as the situation obtaining in the Treaty Area may from time to time require. The Council shall be so organized as to be able to meet at any time.

[See also NATO #12.]

#### ARTICLE VII

Any other State in a position to further the objectives of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of the area may, by unanimous agreement of the Parties, be invited to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines shall inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.

#### ARTICLE IX

2. The Treaty shall be ratified and its provisions carried out by the Parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall

as soon as possible with the Government of the United States of America, which will notify all the other signatories of each deposit. The Treaty shall enter into force between the States which have ratified it as soon as the ratifications of the majority of the signatories, including the ratifications of Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, have been deposited and shall come into effect with respect to other States on the date of the deposit of their ratifications.

#### ARTICLE 12

After the Treaty has been in force for ten years, or at any time thereafter, the Parties shall, if any of them so requests, consult together for the purpose of reviewing the Treaty, having regard for the factors then affecting peace and security in the North Atlantic area, including the development of universal as well as regional arrangements under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security.

#### ARTICLE 13

After the Treaty has been in force for twenty years, any Party may cease to be a party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given to the Government of the United States of America, which will inform the Governments of the other Parties of the deposit of each notice of denunciation.

be deposited as soon as possible with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall notify all of the other signatories of such deposit.

3. The Treaty shall enter into force between the States which have ratified it as soon as the instruments of ratification of a majority of the signatories shall have been deposited, and shall come into effect with respect to each other State on the date of the deposit of its instrument of ratification.

[Touched on in Article V of SEATO.]

#### ARTICLE X

This Treaty shall remain in force indefinitely, but any Party may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall inform the Governments of the other Parties of the deposit of each notice of denunciation.



#### ARTICLE 14

This Treaty, of which the English and French texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the United States of America. Duly certified copies will be transmitted by that Government to the Governments of the other signatories.

#### ARTICLE XI

The English text of this Treaty is binding on the Parties, but when the Parties have agreed to the French text thereof and have so notified the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, the French text shall be equally authentic and binding on the Parties.

#### FROM ARTICLE IX

1. This Treaty shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Duly certified copies thereof shall be transmitted by that Government to the other signatories.

#### UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States of America in executing the present Treaty does so with the understanding that its recognition of the effect of aggression and armed attack and its agreement with reference thereto in Article IV, paragraph 1, apply only to Communist aggression but affirms that in the event of other aggression or armed attack it will consult under the provisions of Article IV, paragraph 2.

In witness whereof the undersigned Plenipotentiaries have signed this Treaty.

Done at Manila, this eighth day of September, 1954.

## PROTOCOL

[On 23 October 1954 a NATO Protocol permitted accession of the Federal Republic of Germany.]

Designation of States and territory as to which provisions of Article IV and Article III are to be applicable:

The Parties to the South-East Asia Collective Defense Treaty unanimously designate for the purposes of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam.

The Parties further agree that the above mentioned States and territory shall be eligible in respect of the economic measures contemplated by Article III.

This Protocol shall enter into force simultaneously with the coming into force of the Treaty.

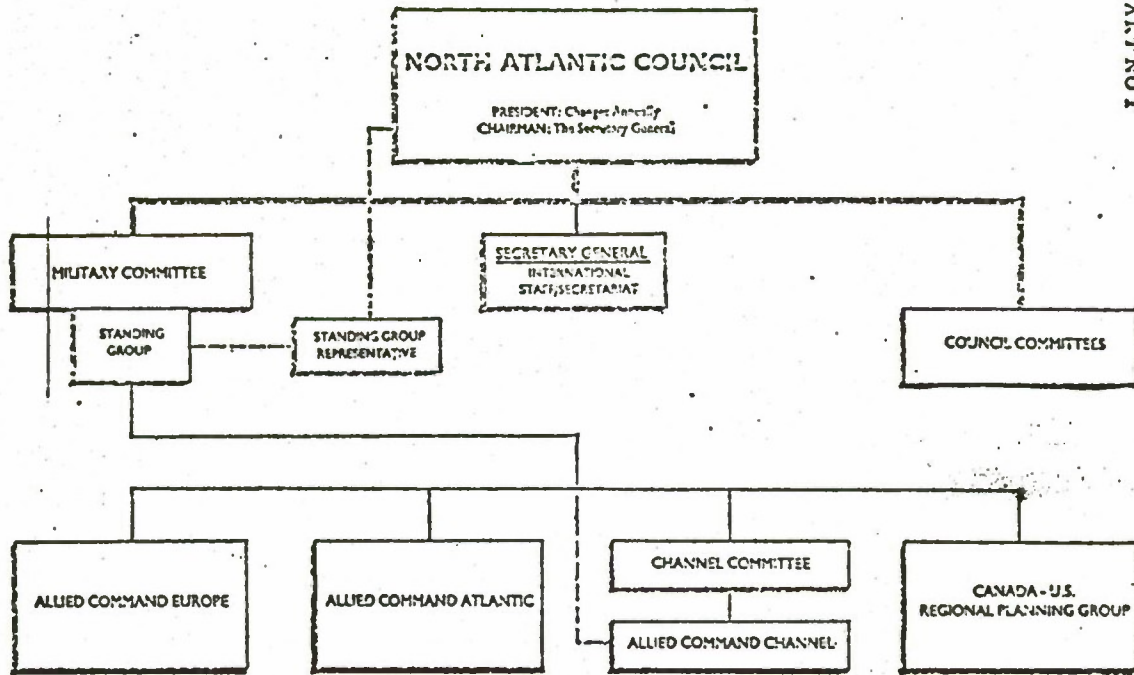
In witness whereof, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries have signed this Protocol to the South-East Asia Collective Defense Treaty.

Done at Manila, this eighth day of September, 1954.



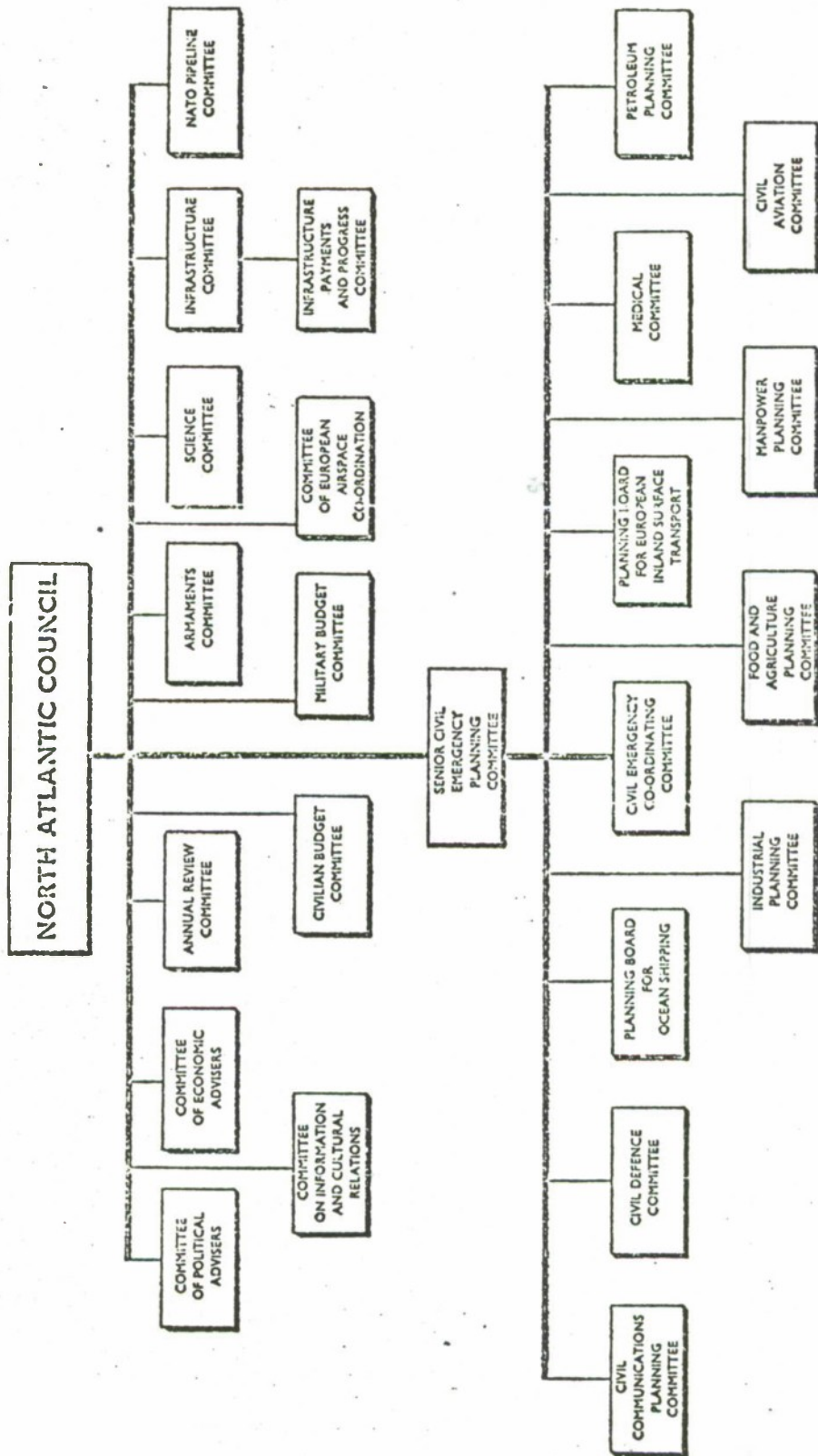
# NATO CIVIL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATION

CITATION NO 1



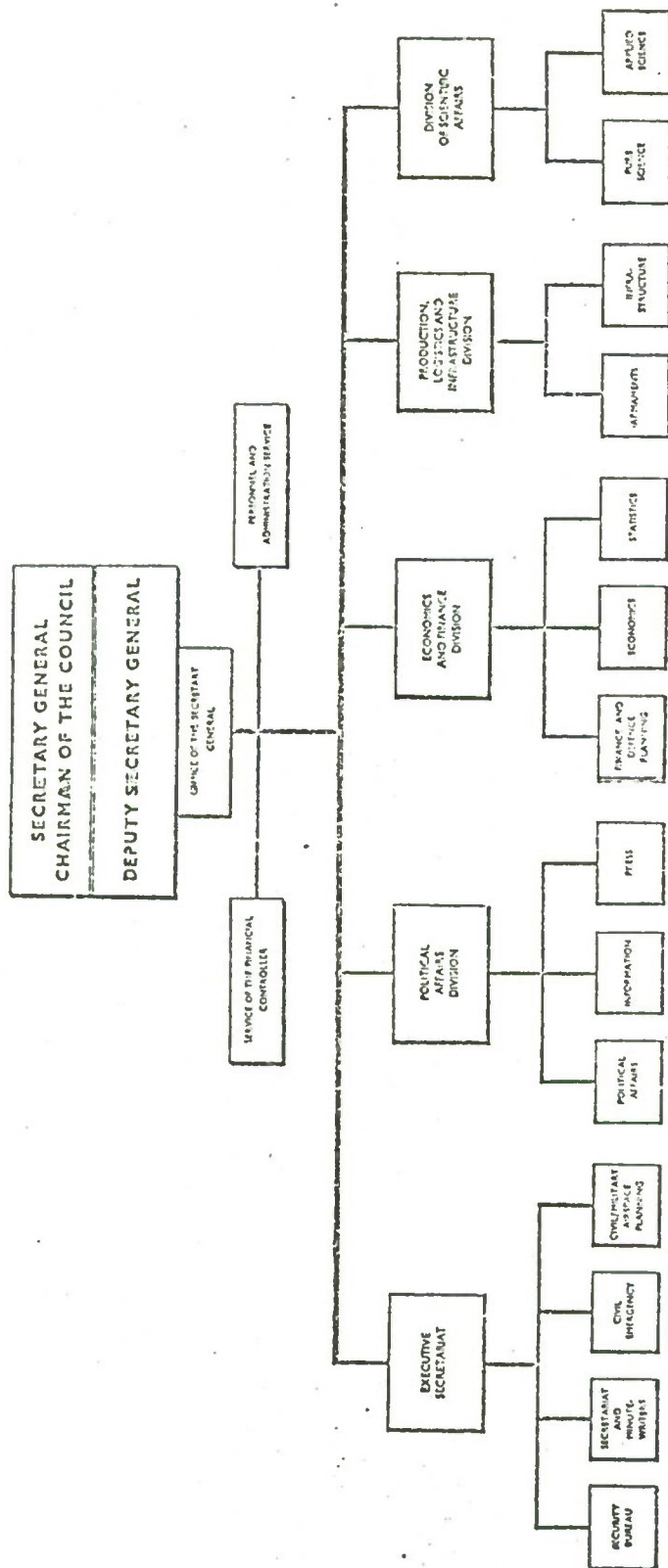
..... Liaison and co-ordination for certain operational matters

# PRINCIPAL COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL





# NATO INTERNATIONAL STAFF/SECRETARIAT

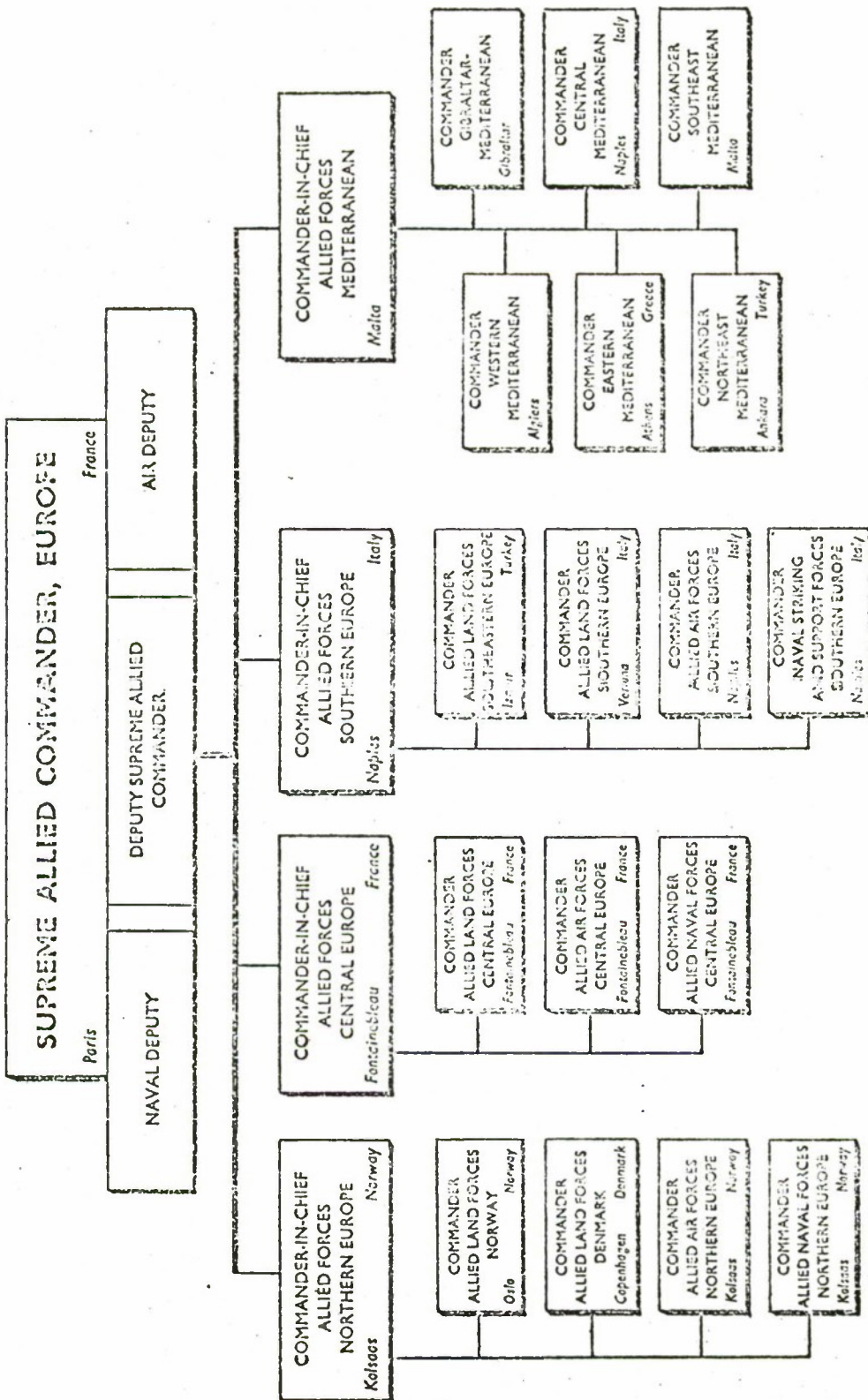


The diagram illustrates the organizational structure of the North Atlantic Council and its military committee. At the top is the **NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL** (Paris). A solid line connects it to the **MILITARY COMMITTEE**. A dashed line connects the Council to the **STANDING GROUP REPRESENTATIVE** (Paris). The Military Committee is linked by a solid line to the **STANDING GROUP** (Washington, U.S.). This Standing Group is further connected by a solid line to a vertical line that branches into four entities: **NATO DEFENCE COLLEGE** (Paris), **MILITARY AGENCY FOR STANDARDIZATION** (London), **COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES IN EUROPE** (Paris-London), and **ADVISORY GROUP FOR AERONAUTICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT** (Paris). Below this vertical line, a solid line connects to the **ALLIED COMMAND EUROPE** (Paris), which is noted as being in Washington D.C., U.S., when in Permanent Session. Another solid line from the vertical line connects to the **ALLIED COMMAND ATLANTIC** (Norfolk, U.S.). A third solid line from the vertical line connects to a box containing the **CHANNEL COMMITTEE** (London, U.K.) and the **ALLIED COMMAND CHANNEL** (Portsmouth/Norwood, U.K.). A final solid line from the vertical line connects to the **CANADA-U.S. REGIONAL PLANNING GROUP** (Washington, U.S.).

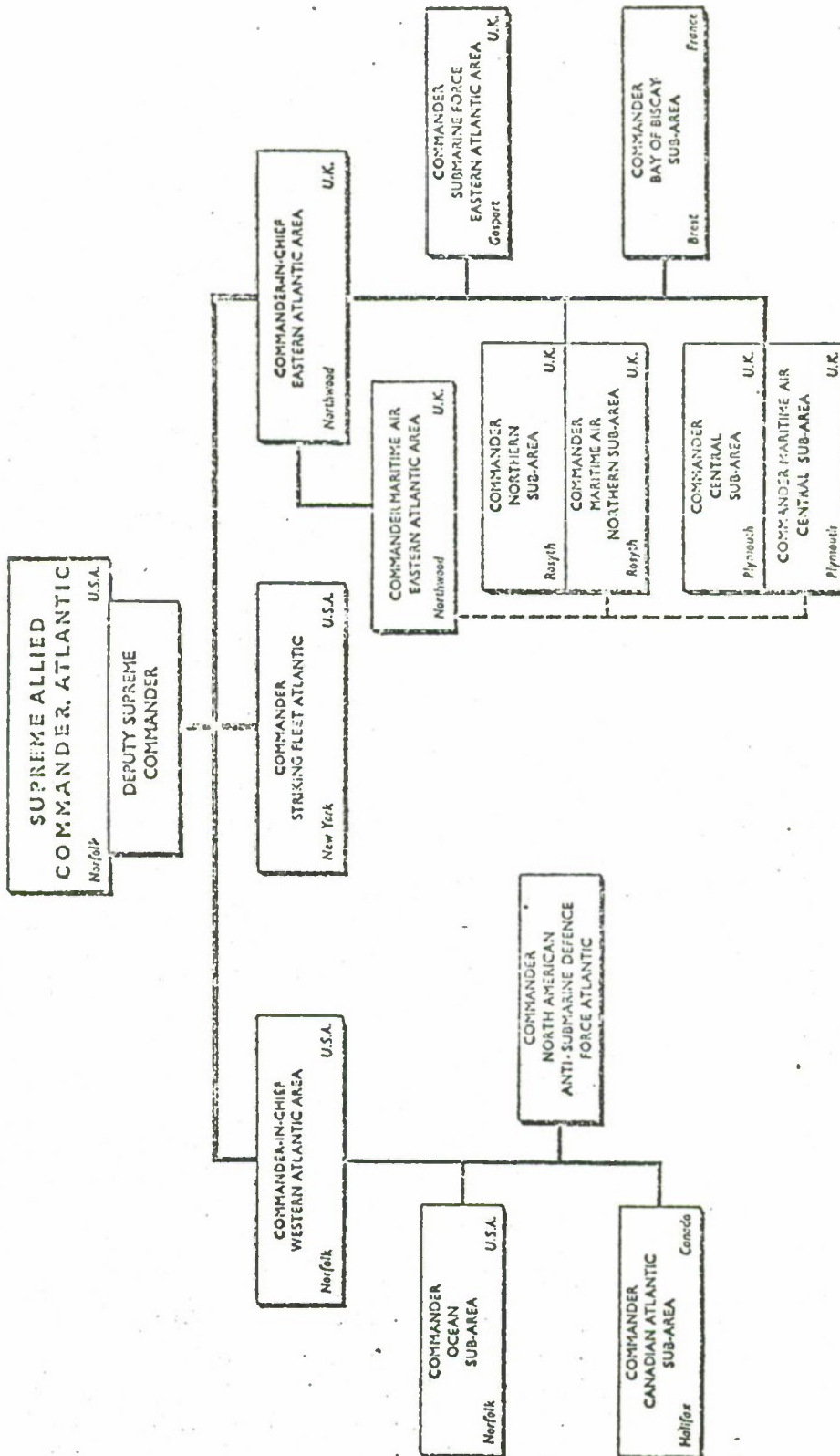
**A-47a**



# ALLIED COMMAND EUROPE



# ALLIED COMMAND ATLANTIC

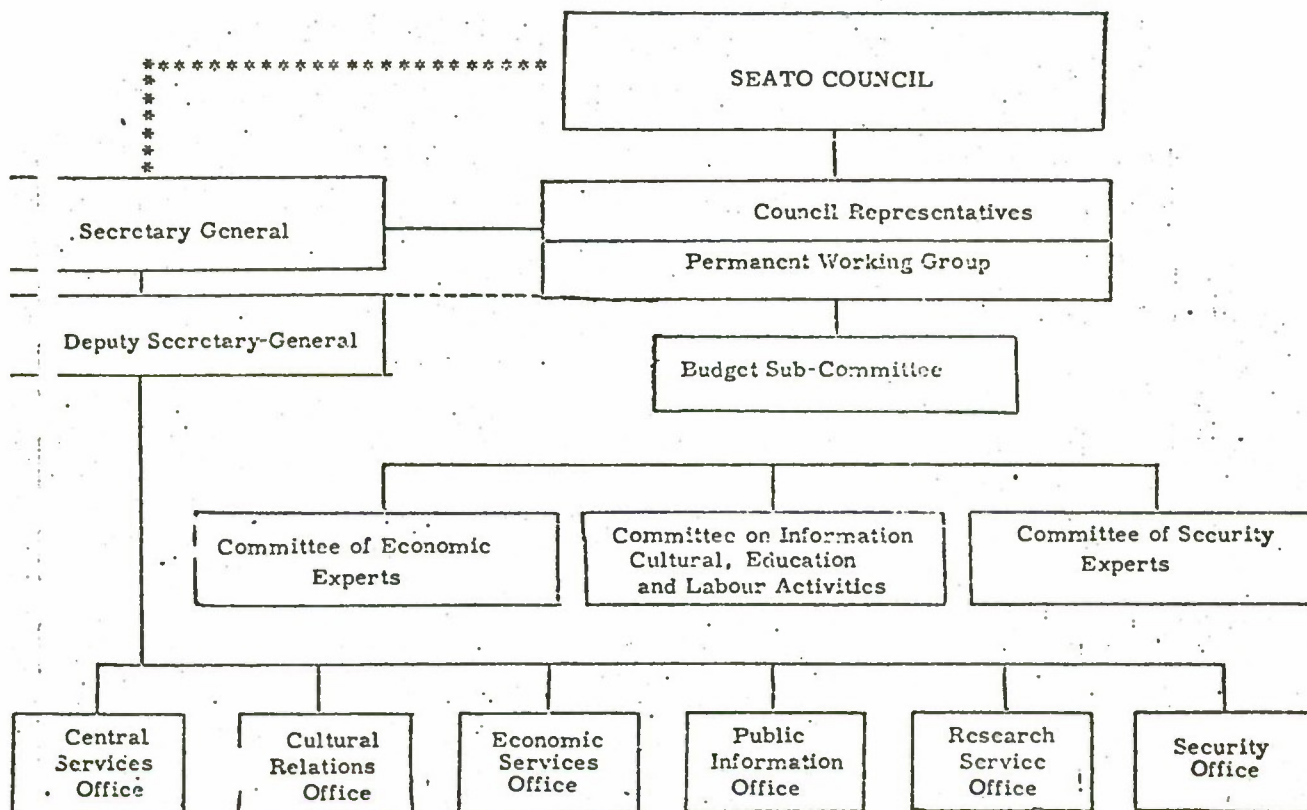




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graph TD
    CC[CHANNEL COMMITTEE  
London U.K.] --- ACM[ALLIED COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
CHANNEL  
Portsmouth U.K.]
    CC --- CMF[COMMANDER  
ALLIED MARITIME AIR FORCE  
CHANNEL  
Northwood U.K.]
    CMF --- CB[COMMANDER  
BENELUX SUB-AREA  
CHANNEL  
Den Helder Neth.]
    CMF --- CP[COMMANDER  
PLYMOUTH SUB-AREA  
CHANNEL  
Plymouth U.K.]
    CMF --- CM[COMMANDER  
MARITIME AIR  
CHANNEL  
Razzyth U.K.]
    CMF --- CMN[COMMANDER  
NORE SUB-AREA  
CHANNEL  
Razzyth U.K.]
    CMF --- CMMA[COMMANDER  
MARITIME AIR  
CHANNEL  
Plymouth U.K.]
    CMF --- CMBS[COMMANDER  
BREIST SUB-AREA  
CHANNEL  
Breist France]
    CMF --- CMCB[COMMANDER  
CHERBOURG SUB-AREA  
CHANNEL  
Cherbourg France]
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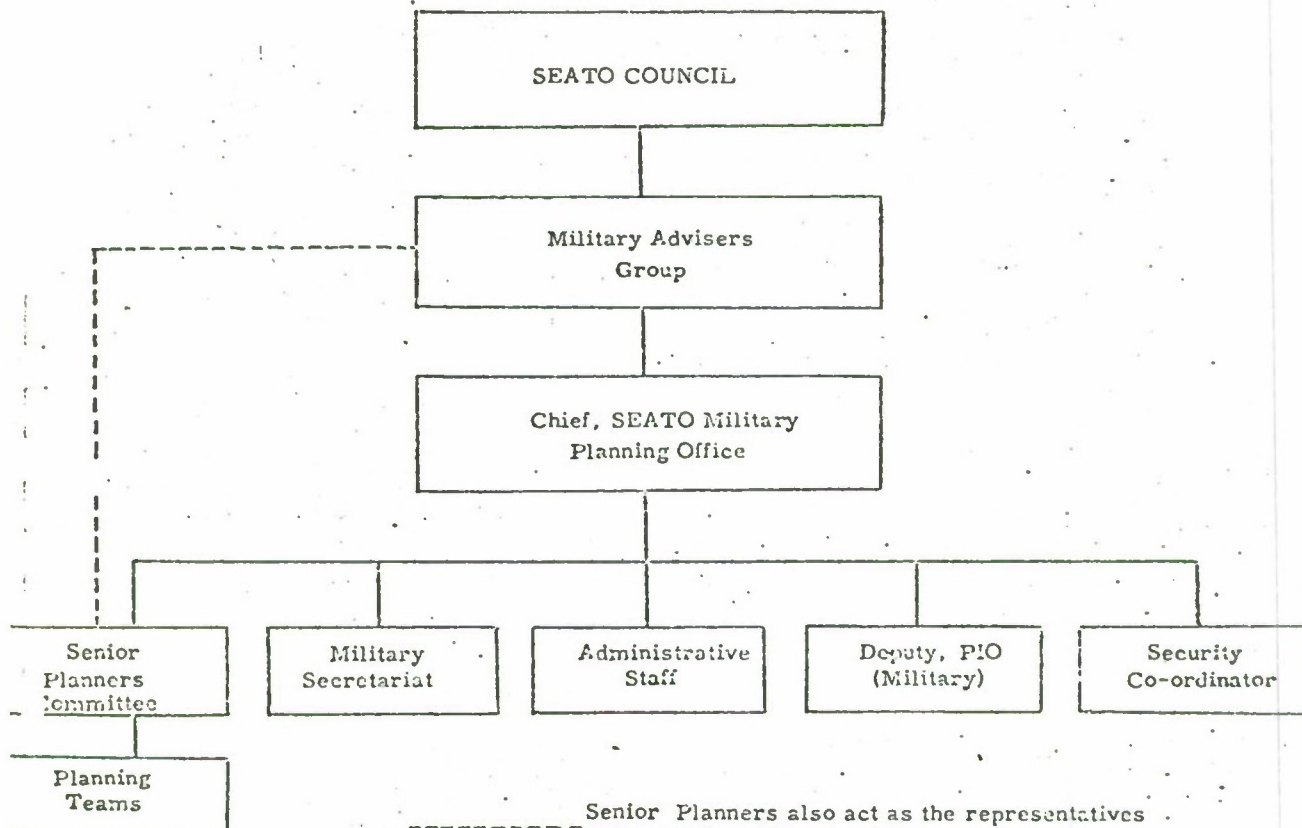
The organizational chart for the Channel Committee is structured as follows:

- CHANNEL COMMITTEE** (London, U.K.)
  - ALLIED COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF CHANNEL** (Portsmouth, U.K.)
    - COMMANDER BREIST SUB-AREA CHANNEL** (Breist, France)
    - COMMANDER CHERBOURG SUB-AREA CHANNEL** (Cherbourg, France)
  - COMMANDER ALLIED MARITIME AIR FORCE CHANNEL** (Northwood, U.K.)
    - COMMANDER BENELUX SUB-AREA CHANNEL** (Den Helder, Neth.)
    - COMMANDER PLYMOUTH SUB-AREA CHANNEL** (Plymouth, U.K.)
    - COMMANDER MARITIME AIR CHANNEL** (Razzyth, U.K.)
    - COMMANDER NORE SUB-AREA CHANNEL** (Razzyth, U.K.)
    - COMMANDER MARITIME AIR CHANNEL** (Plymouth, U.K.)



\*\*\*\*\*When Council is in session  
 -----Chairman of P.W.G.





Senior Planners also act as the representatives in the Military Planning Office of their respective Military Advisers



# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV. A. 2.

AID FOR FRANCE IN INDOCHINA -

1950 - 1954



SUMMARY

The United States decision to provide military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was reached informally in February/March 1950, funded by the President on May 1, 1950, and was announced on May 8 of that year. The decision was taken in spite of the U.S. desire to avoid direct involvement in a colonial war, and in spite of a sensing that France's political-military situation in Indochina was bad and was deteriorating. Moreover, predictions that U.S. aid would achieve a marked difference in the course of the Indochina War were heavily qualified.

The situation in which the decision was made was completely dominated by the take-over of and consolidation of power in China by the communists. Nationalist Chinese forces had been withdrawn from mainland China and Communist Chinese troops had arrived on the border of Indochina in late 1949. This period was the high water mark of U.S. fears of direct Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina. NIE 5 of 29 December 1950 stated: "Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time... it is almost certain to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to maintain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh."

The rationale of the decision was provided by the U.S. view that the Soviet-controlled expansion of communism both in Asia and in Europe required, in the interests of U.S. national security, a counter in Indochina. The domino thesis was quite prominent. On 6 March 1950, the Secretary of Defense wrote the President as follows: "The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal government in Indochina or to face the extension of communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." Despite this statement, it was a generally accepted proposition that "regardless of current U.S. commitments for certain military assistance to China, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances."

The decision to begin military assistance to France and the Associated States of Indochina was not made under the illusion of great expectations. In April 1950, the Joint Chiefs would go no further than to say that prompt delivery of the aid would do no more than create the "possibility of success." In July 1950, General Erskine, after completing his Presidential mission to Indochina, reported that "the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation." All U.S. expectations seemed to have been underpinned by the

Joint Chiefs' belief that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China."

Results of the decision were mixed. Although implementation of the decision was partially successful in that it enabled the French to continue the military campaign in Indochina to the time of the Geneva Accords, military assistance was by and large a failure as an instrument of U.S. policy: the U.S. neither assured the French a military success, influenced the political situation to advantage, nor prevented the loss of North Vietnam to the communists at Geneva.

The U.S. MAAG Indochina was unable to perform even the limited functions assigned it. The French, never eager for U.S. advice, succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense.

Contributing to the initial U.S. decision to aid the French, and to limiting the effectiveness of the U.S. program of assistance, were (1) setting impracticable preconditions for assistance upon the French, (2) the U.S. proclivity to accept a slender chance of success without weighing alternatives, (3) the suppression of alternatives leading to decisional circularity and reinforcement of existing policies, (4) repeated failures of the U.S. to bargain effectively with the French, and (5) the vulnerability of the U.S. policy-making machinery to spoofing, particularly as regards U.S. credulity in accepting French information at face value and in being susceptible to "red" scares.

The decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States is the focus of this discussion; it was but one issue among hundreds preoccupying the United States Government in the time period under consideration -- the fall of China and the Korean War -- and it was probably not regarded by those who made policy as among their critical decisions. There is no evidence of any high U.S. official arguing that any significant commitment threshold was being crossed. There were, however, those who maintained that the important anti-colonial stand of the U.S. was being undermined. These voices (and they were basically from the public domain) were drowned out by those who advocated immediate security needs. The importance of the decision was that when the U.S. was faced with an unambiguous choice between a policy of anti-colonialism and a policy of anti-communism, it chose the latter. And, although the decision was not perceived as getting the U.S. more deeply "involved" in Indochina, it did mark a tangible first step in that direction.



IV. A. 2.

AID FOR FRANCE IN INDOCHINA, 1950-1954

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1. Introduction: The U.S. and the French Colonial War

Because the early phase (1946-1949) of the Indochina war was an overt attempt by the French to reassert authority and control over their Indochinese colonies, the United States, although aware that European Recovery Program (ERP) funds were indirectly used to finance the war, refused to support that war directly. However, American actions taken to assure a neutral position -- refusal to sell armaments to the French for use in Indochina; refusal to transport troops, arms, or ammunition "to or from Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina" 1/ -- accompanied by public and private statements of anti-colonialist sentiments, did constitute, at least in French eyes, a policy hostile to the French interest in Indochina. 2/ Therefore, early in 1947, the Department of State attempted to reassure the French Government, and to make U.S. policies and actions more palatable to them:

"...In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area...." 3/

Neither direct nor indirect assistance to the French effort in Indochina was deemed "appropriate," however, until the French took concrete steps to grant autonomy to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The U.S. was prepared to support the "Bao Dai solution" for Vietnam when and if Bao Dai acquired genuine independence. The U.S. warned France against settling for a "native government [headed by Bao Dai] which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually [a] puppet government, separated from [the] people and existing only by [the] presence [of] French military forces." 4/

In March, 1949, in the so-called Elysee Agreement, France contracted with Bao Dai to grant "independence within the French Union" to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. 5/ Despite U.S. urgings, the Elysee Agreement remained a potentially empty and ill-defined French promise for eleven months. In that period, the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek were driven from the China mainland, and in November, Mao's legions arrived at the Indochina border. In January, 1950, Ho Chi Minh declared that his was the "only legal government of the Vietnamese people" and indicated his willingness to cooperate with any nation willing to recognize it on the basis of "equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory." 6/

The Communist Chinese promptly responded with recognition, followed by the Soviets. In France, there was a sharp debate in the National Assembly between Leftist advocates of an immediate truce with the Viet Minh, and Government supporters of ratification for the Elysee Agreement. On 2 February 1950, the French Government prevailed, and the Elysee Agreement was formally ratified. Under the circumstances, the United States determined that this action met its minimum requirements for tangible French progress towards Vietnamese autonomy. On 3 February, President Truman approved recognition of the States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. 7/ Within three months the United States decided to extend economic and military aid to the new States. On 8 May 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

"The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development." 8/

The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war originated with its decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States, and to form MAAG Indochina. Therefore, it is of particular importance to understand the reasons for the decision, the form of its execution, and its effects.

## 2. The Containment of Communism

U.S. chagrin and increasing concern over the post-World War II expansion of the Soviet Union in Europe, together with fear of further gains by communism, set the tone of U.S. policy toward Asian communist nations in the 1948-1950 period. As the Secretary of State's statement above indicates, these were the days of the "monolithic Communist bloc," dominated by the Soviet Union. A National Security Council policy paper of 1949 stated that:

"The USSR is now an Asiatic power of the first magnitude with expanding influence and interest extending throughout continental Asia and into the Pacific. Since the defeat of Japan...the Soviet Union has been able to consolidate its strategic position until the base of Soviet power in Asia comprises not only the Soviet Far East, but also China north of the Great Wall, Northern Korea, Sakhalin, and the Kuriles." 9/

The question of how best to oppose the expansion of communism in Asia was raised to crisis proportions by the "loss" of China. An extensive and acrimonious national debate on foreign policy was stirred, conducted in the midst of growing public apprehension over communist penetration, espionage, and subversion in Europe and within the United States itself. In Congress, a particularly active and vocal group



advocated increased aid to the Chinese Nationalists, who were regarded by many, even at this late date, as the bulwark containing communism in Asia. 10/ Although no major emphasis was given Indochina in 1949, NSC papers did discuss the importance of the Franco-Viet Minh struggle, and link the future of Indochina with that of the rest of the world:

"In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of Southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire Southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of Southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us: if Southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia." 11/

It was precisely the extension of communist authority over China referred to above that led to increased emphasis in U.S. policy on Indochina in late 1949 and 1950.

Following the Chinese Communist victories of 1949 and the movement of Chinese Communist troops to the border of Indochina in November of that year, NSC 64 (February 7, 1950) concluded that "the Departments of State and Defense should prepare, as a matter of priority, a program of all practicable measures designed to protect U.S. security interests in Indochina." 12/ On the same day, 13/ following the Communist Chinese (January 18) and the Soviet (January 30) recognition of the Ho Chi Minh regime, 14/ the United States announced its recognition of the Bao Dai Government. Theretofore, the U.S. had remained neutral, hesitating to choose between supporting France, a friendly colonial power engaged in re-establishing its authority, or supporting the Viet Minh, a communist-dominated independence movement in opposition to that European ally. This dilemma had been resolved by the victory of the Chinese Communists over the Nationalists, and by the threat posed to Indochina. The United States policy of support for the French and the Associated States was adjudged one befitting an anti-colonial democracy: support of nationalism and independence; opposition to attempted encroachments thereon by international communism.

### 3. "The Line of Containment" and "The Domino Theory"

The logic of this shift in U.S. policy is found not only in the direct threat to Southeast Asia posed by Communist China (and the Soviet Union), but also in the broader strategic concept of a line of containment, and in the early articulation of what later became known as the

"domino theory." Discussion of the line of containment centered about where that line was to be drawn: Indochina, and, later, Korea, fell on the free side of that line. 15/ The domino notion had been advanced by General Claire Chennault, among others, in the reference to Nationalist China 16/; the domino theory as applied to Indochina reinforced the decision of where to draw the line of containment. Both ideas were embodied by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a 1950 memorandum to the Secretary of Defense evaluating "the strategic importance, from the military point of view, of Southeast Asia":

"c. Southeast Asia is a vital segment in the line of containment of Communism stretching from Japan southward and around to the Indian Peninsula... The security of the three major non-Communist base areas in this quarter of the world -- Japan, India, and Australia -- depends in a large measure on the denial of Southeast Asia to the Communists. If Southeast Asia is lost, these three base areas will tend to be isolated from one another;

"d. The fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia...

"e. The fall of Southeast Asia would result in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia...

"f. ... Soviet control of all the major components of Asia's war potential might become a decisive factor affecting the balance of power between the United States and the USSR...

"g. A Soviet position of dominance over the Far East would also threaten the United States position in Japan... The feasibility of retention by the United States of its offshore island bases could thus be jeopardized." 17/

This theory, whether more or less completely articulated, appears in the relevant NSC papers of the Indochina War period, and underlies all major U.S. policy decisions taken relevant to the area. 18/

#### 4. U.S. Perception of the Chinese Communist Threat

In the words of NSC 64 (February, 1950), "The presence of Chinese Communist troops along the border of Indochina makes it possible for arms, material and troops to move freely from Communist China to the northern Tonkin area now controlled by Ho Chi Minh. There is already evidence of movement of arms." 19/ NIE 5 maintained somewhat later, as the decision to help the French was being re-examined, that: "The Communist Chinese regime is already furnishing the Viet Minh materiel, training, and technical assistance. Official French sources report that Chinese Communist troops are already present in Tonkin in some strength... 20/ Direct intervention by Chinese Communist troops may occur at any time... It is almost certain



to occur in strength whenever there is danger either that the Viet Minh will fail to attain its military objective of driving the French out of Indochina, or that the Bao Dai Government is succeeding in undermining the support of the Viet Minh." 21/ NIE 5 appeared on December 29, 1950.

Although the threat of intervention to be expected from Communist China did not again reach this intensity or certainty during the remainder of the war -- the estimated probability of intervention declined consistently after the publication of NIE 5 -- estimates throughout the period indicate continuing Communist Chinese provision of military arms, materiel, and training to the Viet Minh, and the existence of Communist Chinese potential for direct intervention. No direct reference was made to possible Viet Minh resentment toward, or resistance to, direct Chinese intervention.

In sum, the U.S. perceived a major Chinese threat at the time the decision to support France and the Associated States was made; a high probability was assigned direct Chinese Communist intervention at the time this decision was being confirmed; this assigned probability declined rapidly, and it remained low through the post-Korean war period. It was believed that the Chinese were providing assistance to the Viet Minh throughout the period late 1949-1954.

#### 5. U.S. Perceptions of the Situation within Vietnam

On April 5, 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, referring to intelligence estimates, indicated to the Secretary of Defense their view that "the situation in Southeast Asia has deteriorated," and that, further, "without United States assistance, this deterioration will be accelerated." 22/ (The implication that U.S. assistance would result in improvement over and above the present situation cannot be detected in this carefully worded statement.) The Joint Chiefs of Staff went on to state that: "In general, the basic conditions of political and economic stability in this area, as well as the military and internal security conditions, are unsatisfactory. These factors are closely interrelated, and it is probable that, from the long-term point of view, political and economic stability is the controlling factor. On the other hand, the military situation in some areas, particularly Indochina, is of pressing urgency."

NIE 5 was the over-all U.S. assessment of the situation in Vietnam closest in time to the U.S. decision to support the French and the Associated States. It estimated the French position as "critically endangered by the Viet Minh," and as "precarious." 23/ Combining the more detailed estimates of this document with statements and estimates contained in other U.S. documents contemporary with NIE 5, the following picture emerges:

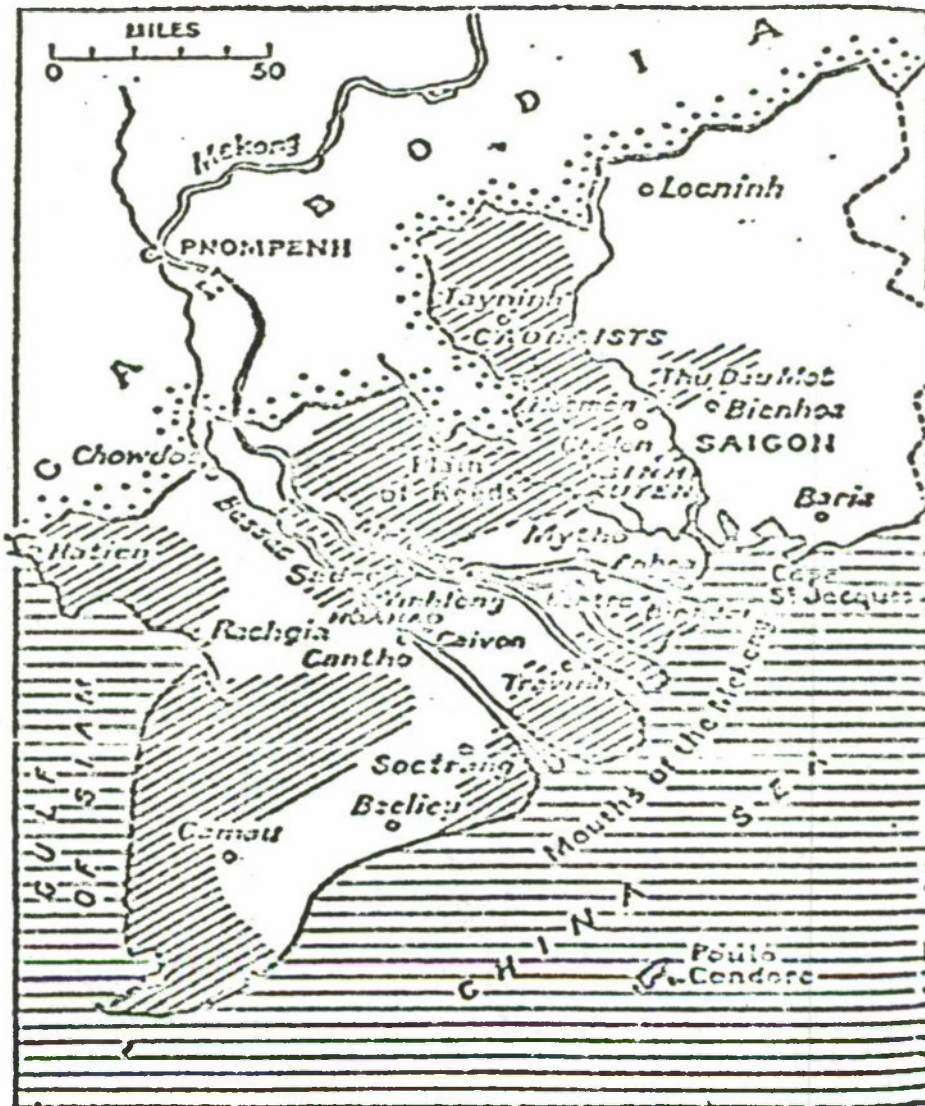
##### a. The Military Situation

- (1) French-Viet Minh areas of control - see maps







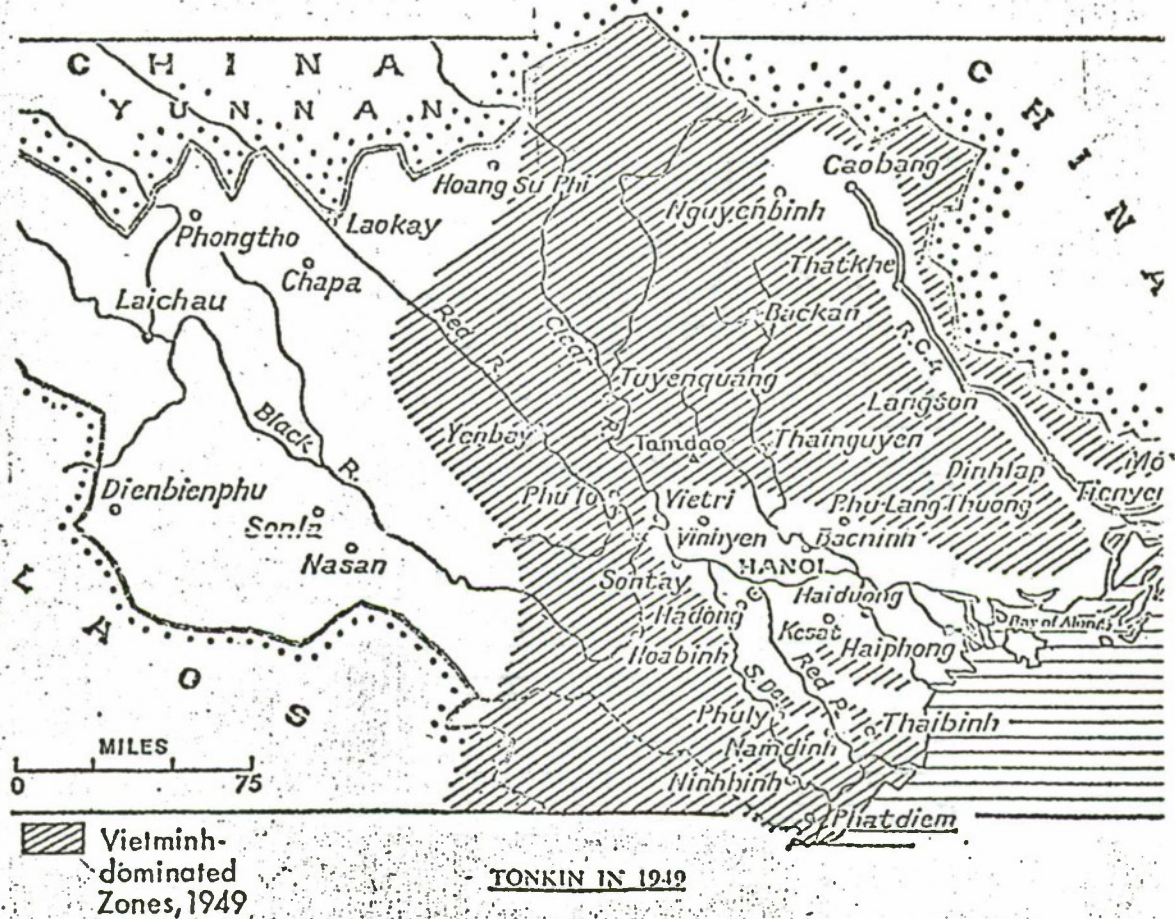


COCHINCHINA IN 1949

 Vietminh-dominated Zones, 1949

Source: L. Bodard, *The Cochinchina War* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1967), 30.





Source: L. Bodard, *The Quickest War* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1967), 22



# DISSIDENT ACTIVITIES IN INDOCHINA

(3 November 1950)



Areas in which Communist-led rebels are challenging government authority.



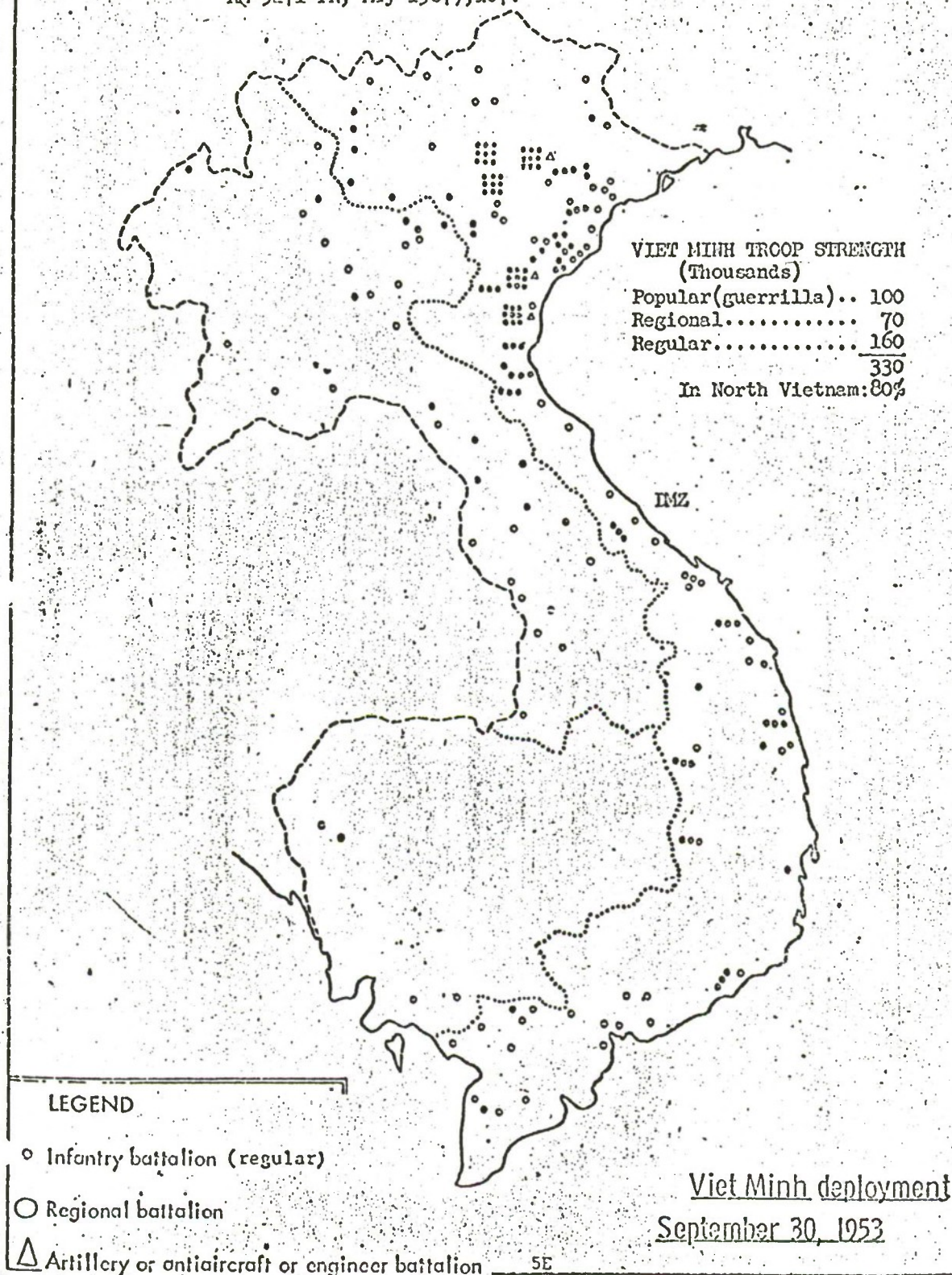
Areas in which Communist-instigated guerrilla attacks have recently occurred.



SOURCE: CIA, NIE-5  
Map Supplement  
5 January 1951



Source: V.J.Croizat, trans., A Translation from the French:  
Lessons of the War in Indochina (Santa Monica: RAND Corp.,  
 RM-5271-PR, May 1967), 107.





- (2) Force ratio - French between 1.5 and 1.6 to 1 Viet Minh; vis-a-vis regular forces in the Tonkin Delta, the ratio was reversed - approximately 1.15 Viet Minh to 1 French (NIE 5).
- (3) Equipment status - French superiority, but Viet Minh improving due to Chinese aid.
- (4) Mobility - Viet Minh superior; French roadbound.
- (5) Strategy - French strategy lacking in aggressiveness, defensive, of doubtful value.
- (6) Status of Vietnamese National Army - essentially none; "only a slight chance that the French can maintain their military position long enough" 24/ to build such an army.
- (7) Relative capabilities - danger of a major military defeat of the French by the Viet Minh in Tonkin within six to nine months, which would jeopardize the French position in the remainder of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

b. The Economic and Political Situation

French resources badly strained; little or no real nationalist Vietnamese leadership, government; little popular support of Bao Dai regime 25/; political and economic situation generally poor.

c. French Objectives in Vietnam

French slowness and obstructionism over the years in creating a Vietnamese national government and national army (March 8, 1949, agreements were not ratified by France until February 2, 1950), and continued slowness in giving control of the bureaucracy to the Vietnamese, indicate a reluctant departure, if any departure, from colonial objectives.

d. French Resolve to Remain in Vietnam

"... there are grounds for questioning the French will to remain in Indochina." 26/

Thus, the American perception of the situation in Vietnam in 1950 was generally one of gloom, with little light at the end of the tunnel; in retrospect, it seems reasonably accurate.

6. The Decision to Assist France and the Associated States

a. French Request Aid

United States involvement in the bleak Indochinese situation was hastened when, on February 16, 1950, the French requested U.S. military

and economic assistance for the prosecution of the Indochinese war. The French forwarded their request after deciding "to set forth to the United States Government fully and frankly the extreme gravity of the situation in Indochina..."

"... the truth of the matter was that the effort in Indochina was such of a drain on France that a long-term program of assistance was necessary and it was only from the United States that it could come. Otherwise ... it was very likely that France might be forced to reconsider her entire policy with the possible view to cutting her losses and withdrawing from Indochina ... looking into the future it was obvious ... that France could not continue indefinitely to bear this burden alone if the expected developments in regard to increased assistance to Ho Chi Minh came about... In any event the French Government was confronted with necessity of reducing the present French forces in Indochina by at least 25,000 not only for budgetary reasons, but because additional men were urgently needed in connection with French national military program." 27/

Yet this appeal for aid, its thinly-veiled reinforcing arguments referring to withdrawal and the defense of Europe (on the day following the severing of U.S.-Bulgarian relations), was unaccompanied by a willingness to satisfy a U.S. request for France to announce the "evolutionary nature" of the governments of the Associated States, or to clarify otherwise the French intentions toward Indochina.

On February 27, a Department of State report on the position of the United States with respect to Indochina was submitted for the NSC's consideration. Issued on February 27 as NSC 64, the report concluded that:

"10. It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.

"11. The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.

"12. Accordingly, the Departments of State and Defense should prepare as a matter of priority a program of all practicable measures designed to protect United States security interests in Indochina." 28/

To "facilitate" Department of Defense consideration of NSC 64, then Deputy Under Secretary of State Dean Rusk provided Major General James H. Burns of OSD a brief statement of Department of State policy in Indochina and Southeast Asia:



"The Department of State believes that within the limitations imposed by existing commitments and strategic priorities, the resources of the United States should be deployed to reserve Indochina and Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. The Department of State has accordingly already engaged all its political resources to the end that this object be secured. The Department is now engaged in the process of urgently examining what additional economic resources can effectively be engaged in the same operation.

"It is now, in the opinion of the Department, a matter of the greatest urgency that the Department of Defense assess the strategic aspects of the situation and consider, from the military point of view, how the United States can best contribute to the prevention of further Communist encroachment in that area." 29/

In a memorandum for the President of March 6, 1950, the Secretary of Defense described U.S. options as follows:

"The French are irrevocably committed in Indochina and are supporting the three states as a move aimed at achieving non-Communist political stability... The choice confronting the United States is to support the legal governments in Indochina or to face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and possibly westward..." 30/

b. The Griffin Mission

While the choice among alternatives awaited provision of the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military departments, 31/ the Secretary of State sent to the Far East "the Griffin Mission," which was given the task of surveying "the kinds and approximate value of assistance needed" 32/ in Indochina (among other countries). Departing when it did, some five months following the fall of Nationalist China, and headed by the former Deputy Chief of the Aid Mission to Mainland China, the Griffin Mission was probably intended to avoid further attacks on the State Department's Asia policy as well as to determine how U.S. economic resources might effectively be employed in Southeast Asia.

On March 22, the Griffin Mission report recommended U.S. aid for a program of rural rehabilitation, the provision of limited amounts of commodities and industrial equipment, and a program of technical assistance. These measures were estimated to cost \$23.5 million for the period through June, 1951. The mission also recommended the "psychological shock of ships with military aid material in the immediate future" 33/ as a measure to dramatize the U.S. commitment to those on the scene.

c. JCS Views

On April 5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to a request by the Secretary of Defense with recommendations for measures which, from

the United States military point of view, might prevent communist expansion in Southeast Asia. 34/ The six most important points made by the Chiefs are these:

(1) A recommendation for early implementation of military aid programs for Indochina and the other states of Southeast Asia, with funds already allocated to the states of Southeast Asia, to be delivered at the earliest practicable date and to be augmented as a matter of urgency with funds from the unallocated portion of the President's emergency fund. For the next fiscal year, an estimated \$100 million will be required for the military portion of this program.

(2) "In view of the history of military aid in China, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urge that these aid programs be subject, in any event, to the following conditions:

"a. That United States military aid not be granted unconditionally; rather that it be carefully controlled and that the aid program be integrated with political and economic programs; and

"b. That requests for military equipment be screened first by an officer designated by the Department of Defense and on duty in the recipient state. These requests should be subject to his determination as to the feasibility and satisfactory coordination of specific military operations. It should be understood that military aid will only be considered in connection with such coordinated operational plans as are approved by the representative of the Department of Defense on duty in the recipient country. Further, in conformity with current procedures, the final approval of all programs for military materiel will be subject to the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

(3) "Formation of a Southeast Asia Aid Committee is recommended.

(4) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize the political implications involved in military aid to Indochina. It must be appreciated, however, that French armed forces ... are in the field and that if these were to be withdrawn this year because of political considerations, the Bao Dai regime probably could not survive even with United States aid. If the United States were now to insist upon independence for Vietnam and a phased French withdrawal from that country, this might improve the political situation. The French could be expected to interpose objections to, and certainly delays in such a program. Conditions in Indochina, however, are unstable and the situation is apparently deteriorating rapidly so that the urgent need for at least an initial increment of military and economic aid is psychologically overriding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, recommend the provision of military aid to Indochina at the earliest practicable date under a program to implement the President's action approving the allocation of \$15 million for Indochina and that corresponding increments of political and economic aid be programmed on an interim basis without prejudice to the pattern of the policy for additional military, political and economic aid that may be developed later."



(5) " ... the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the immediate establishment of a small United States military aid group in Indochina... The Joint Chiefs of Staff would expect the senior member of this group to sit in consultation with military representatives of France and Vietnam and possibly of Laos and Cambodia. In addition to screening requests for materiel, he would be expected to insure full coordination of military plans and efforts between the French and Vietnamese forces and to supervise the allocation of materiel."

(6) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe in the possibility of success of a prompt coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid to Southeast Asia and feel that such a success might well lead to the gaining of the initiative in the struggle in that general area."

The last of these points is clearly fundamental to the undertaking of any program of assistance; yet in the Chiefs' memorandum it appears only as the concluding portion of the paragraph (paragraph 15) recommending establishment of a military aid group in Indochina, and is subsequently subjected to the qualification that "attainment of United States objectives in Asia can only be achieved by ultimate success in China." More remarkable, however, is the rarity with which even such equivocal predictions of success appear in the available documents relating directly to the decision to provide assistance to Indochina. Direct statements on the probable effectiveness of such United States programs of the period are typically absent; indirect statements are typically of the implied-imperative ("we must do X if Asia is to be saved"), or the negative-imperative (if we do not do X, Asia will be lost"). There was no assurance of military success given; and the calculus of the decision-making process relating to the weighing of the probability of success against the costs of failure of U.S. programs in the 1950 period is not evident, unfortunately, in available documents.

#### d. Presidential Approval

On May 1, 1950, President Truman approved the allocation of \$10 million to the Department of Defense to cover the early shipment of urgently needed military assistance items to Indochina, 35/ thus taking the first crucial decision regarding U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. On May 8, the Secretary of State, in a statement at the ministerial level meeting in Paris, announced United States assistance to the Associated States and France. And on May 24, the governments of France and the Associated States were notified of the United States intention to establish an economic aid mission to the Associated States, thus marking the implementation of the recommendations of the Griffin Mission.

On June 27, 1950, President Truman, in announcing the onset of the Korean war, also stated that he had "directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close



working relations with those forces." 36/ The concept of a military assistance advisory group had also been approved, although the President did not refer to MAAG in his public statement. 37/ Also, in June, following the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee was established.

e. Erskine Mission

The military mission dispatched by the President and headed by Major General Graves B. Erskine, USMC, arrived in Saigon on July 15, and reported its findings on August 5. General Erskine reported that a permanent solution of the Indochina crisis went beyond military action alone, the core of the problem being a deep-seated hatred and distrust of the French by the population that precluded their cooperation in the prosecution of the war. The mission also reported that the amount of aid and the scope of the assistance thus far requested by the French were inadequate to the needs of the situation. 38/

The first elements of the U.S. MAAG were assigned to Indochina on August 3, 1950; Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, USA, assumed command as the first Chief of MAAG on October 10. The mission of the MAAG was limited to provision of material assistance to the French forces and indirect provision of military aid to the forces of the Associated States; General Brink was directed not to assume any training or advisory responsibilities toward the indigenous armies. But from the outset, the French rigorously limited end-use inspections of MAAG to a small number of carefully prescribed visits. 39/

f. JCS Reevaluation

After the initial decision to provide assistance to France and the Associated States had been taken, the formation of an economic mission had been announced, the first shipment of arms and equipment had arrived in Indochina, and the MAAG had been approved and was in the process of formation, concern mounted over the soundness of these moves. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were again asked by the Secretary of Defense to formulate a position on future U.S. actions with respect to Indochina, and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee (SEAAPC) published, on October 11, 1950, a draft "Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy on Indochina." The SEAAPC statement proposed adding another dimension to U.S. assistance policy: "Regardless of current U.S. commitments for provision of certain military assistance to Indochina, the U.S. will not commit any of its armed forces to the defense of Indochina against overt, foreign aggression, under present circumstances." 40/ The paper also recommended that the U.S. support the "prompt acceleration of the formation of new national armies of the three Associated States," and a covering memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense recommended that if negotiations were conducted with the French, U.S. representatives should:

"... secure French acceptance of the following conditions which shall attach to the extension of U.S. assistance in the



formation of national armies in Indochina: (1) French Union Forces would not be withdrawn from Indochina until such Associated States armies are fully trained and ready to act effectively in replacement; (2) France would not decrease its outlays for Indochina below the 1950 rate during the period of the American military aid requested; (3) the national armies project would have the approval of the three Associated States governments; (4) the High Commissioner for Indochina, the French Command, and the three Associated States would maintain full consultative relations with the Legation and MAAG during the period of the formation of the armies."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reevaluation appeared on October 27: military aid should be continued on an expedited basis. Again the judgment was offered that genuine autonomy and self-government had to be extended to the people of Indochina to ameliorate the basic cause of the deterioration of security in Indochina: lack of popular support for the authorities. 41/ But the most clearly articulated and complete expression of the Joint Chiefs' over-all position at year end is found in NSC 64/1, 42/ a November 28 paper by the Chiefs which takes account of a report from General Brink 43/ and the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee's draft of October 11; in fact, this statement of short- and long-run objectives contained in NSC 64/1 was to remain the basis of United States policy toward Indochina for the duration of the French-Indochina war.

#### "SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES

"a. The United States should take action, as a matter of urgency, by all means practicable short of the actual employment of United States military forces, to deny Indochina to Communism.

"b. As long as the present situation exists, ~~the~~ United States should continue to insure that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French.

"c. The United States should seek to develop its military assistance program for Indochina based on an over-all military plan prepared by the French, concurred in by the Associated States of Indochina, and acceptable to the United States.

"(1) Both the plan and the program should be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency. It should be clearly understood, however, that United States acceptance of the plan is limited to the logistical support which the United States may agree to furnish. The aid provided under the program should be furnished to the French in Indochina and to the Associated States. The allocation of United States military assistance as between the French and the national armies of Indochina should be approved by the French and United States authorities in Indochina.

"(2) Popular support of the Government by the Indochinese people is essential to a favorable settlement of the security problem of Indochina. Therefore, as a condition to the provision of those further increases in military assistance to Indochina necessary for the implementation of an agreed over-all military plan, the United States Government should obtain assurances from the French Government that:

"(a) A program providing for the eventual self-government of Indochina either within or outside of the French Union will be developed, made public, and implementation initiated at once in order to strengthen the national spirit of the Indochinese in opposition to Communism.

"(b) National armies of the Associated States of Indochina will be organized as a matter of urgency. While it is doubtful that the buildup of these armies can be accomplished in time to contribute significantly to the present military situation, the direct political and psychological benefits to be derived from this course would be great and would thus result in immediate, although indirect, military benefits.

"(c) Pending the formation and training of Indochinese national armies as effective units, and as an interim emergency measure, France will dispatch sufficient additional armed forces to Indochina to insure that the restoration of peace and internal security in that country will be accomplished in accordance with the timetable of the over-all military plan for Indochina.

"(d) France will change its political and military concepts in Indochina to:

i. Eliminate its policy of  
'colonialism.'

ii. Provide proper tutelage to  
the Associated States.

iii. Insure that a suitable military command structure, unhampered by political interference, is established to conduct effective and appropriate military operations...

"(3) At an appropriate time the United States should institute checks to satisfy itself that the conditions set forth in subparagraph c.(2) above are being fulfilled.

"d. The United States should exert all practicable political and diplomatic measures required to obtain the



recognition of the Associated States by the other non-Communist states of Southeast and South Asia.

"e. In the event of overt attack by organized Chinese Communist forces against Indochina, the United States should not permit itself to become engaged in a general war with Communist China but should, in concert with the United Kingdom, support France and the Associated States by all means short of the actual employment of United States military forces. This support should include appropriate expansion of the present military assistance program and endeavors to induce States in the neighborhood of Indochina to commit armed forces to resist the aggression.

"f. The United States should immediately reconsider its policy toward Indochina whenever it appears that the French Government may abandon its military position in that country or plans to refer the problem of Indochina to the United Nations. Unless the situation throughout the world generally, and Indochina specifically, changes materially, the United States should seek to dissuade the French from referring the Indochina question to the United Nations.

"g. Inasmuch as the United States-sponsored resolution, 'Uniting for Peace,' has been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and should a situation develop in Indochina in a manner similar to that in Korea in which United Nations forces were required, the United States would then probably be morally obligated to contribute its armed forces designated for service on behalf of the United Nations. It is, therefore, in the interests of the United States to take such action in Indochina as would forestall the need for the General Assembly to invoke the provisions of the resolution, 'Uniting for Peace.' ..."

The JCS also proposed long-term objectives, urging the development of an underground guerrilla warfare capability, a psychological warfare program ("to demonstrate the evils of Communism....and to warn...of renewed Chinese imperialism"), and encouragement of an appropriate regional security arrangement. These concepts formed the heart of an NSC Staff Study of December 28. 44/ The initial decision to give assistance was confirmed after nearly one year's continual re-examination, and remained basic to U.S. policy for the remainder of the war.

## 7. MAP for Indochina

### a. Magnitude

The U.S. military assistance program to the French and Associated States was implemented rapidly, considering the major U.S.

commitment to the Korean war. In a somewhat premature judgment of outcomes, a progress report on the implementation of NSC 64 (March 15, 1951) stated that "American military aid furnished the States' forces and the Army of the French Union may have been the decisive factor in the preservation of the area against Communist aggression." 45/ Through 1952 and into 1954 the MDAP shipments to Indochina increased steadily 46/: by February 3, 1953, the United States had shipped 137,200 long tons of material (224 ships' cargoes); by July 1954, approximately 150,000 long tons had been sent, including 1,800 combat vehicles, 30,887 motor transport vehicles, 361,522 small arms and machine guns, 438 naval craft, 2 World War II aircraft carriers, and about 500 aircraft. By the conclusion of the Geneva agreements in July, 1954, the U.S. had delivered aid to Indochina at an original cost of \$2,600 million. 47/ Nonetheless, protests of the French at the slowness of deliveries and the "interference" of MAAG with French requests were recurrent, and peaked, during the crisis days of 1954. Yet these complaints probably reflected less genuine U.S. shortcomings than French resentment of American efforts to advise, screen, inspect, and verify, and sheer frustration. Moreover, the vagaries of the French logistic system not only made the MAAG job more difficult, but further impeded combat supplies.

#### b. Effectiveness

In spite of the conditions under which U.S. assistance to France and the Associated States was given, the MAAG during the period of the Indochina war was little more than a small (70 in 1950, 342 in 1954) supply-support group which exerted far more influence upon U.S. decisions than on the French. The French, never eager for American advice, not only succeeded in limiting the function of MAAG to order-taking in the commercial sense, but in fact -- through adroit pressuring of officials above the MAAG -- sometimes reduced MAAG to the position of taking their military orders. Available data do not permit detailed evaluation of the efficiency of MAP, but it seems clear that French restrictions on the U.S. MAAG reduced it to virtual impotence. 48/

However, to relate any judgment of the effectiveness of the United States assistance program simply and directly to the outcome of the war would clearly be inappropriate. For the most part, U.S. expectations were not high. In the words of the American Ambassador to France in February, 1950, "obviously any program of external assistance was marginal in character and entirely dependent for its success upon the solidity of the base -- in this case, the firmness of French policy and actions in Indochina." 49/ French determination to resist American advice was not matched by firmness in proceeding with granting independence to Vietnam, or otherwise meeting the political situation in Indochina. Hence, as the U.S. apparently expected, a favorable outcome to the Indochina war continued to elude France, even with American material and financial help. U.S. assistance enabled France to wage a military battle while it lost its political war -- in Saigon and in Paris. (The military defeat at Dien Bien Phu was important primarily from the point of view of its psychological and political impact on the French, and was so interpreted in the relevant U.S. intelligence estimates.) 50/



If it would be an error to evaluate the effectiveness of the U.S. program in terms of war outcome, and if the efficiency of MAP and MAAG cannot meaningfully be analyzed, it remains to evaluate the degree to which France met the conditions under which assistance was tendered, which presumably impinged directly on U.S. political objectives:

- (1) The United States objective of insuring "that the primary responsibility for the restoration of peace and security in Indochina rests with the French" was fulfilled; in fact, it was insisted on by the French. On the one hand, U.S. military forces were never directly engaged in the Indochina war. On the other hand, the French, in retaining this primary responsibility, preserved the prerogative to determine policy and the freedom to reject U.S. advice. U.S. "leverage" was minimal.
- (2) The condition of basing the assistance program on "an urgently prepared French plan acceptable to the Associated States and to the U.S." was frustrated in several ways. At the outset no overall plan was presented, and those portions of existing plans to which U.S. authorities were privy (e.g., Alessandri's pacification plan for the Tonkin Delta) were not acceptable to U.S. thinking. Second, when the Letourneau-Allard and Navarre plans were finally prepared (in 1953, three years after the U.S. decided that a plan was a necessary precondition for aid), some U.S. observers realized that these were more concepts than plans. U.S. acceptance of the plans was more reluctant than the granting of \$385 million in additional assistance might indicate. 51/ Finally, the plans, once "accepted," were not vigorously carried out. 52/
- (3) The French met pro forma the condition that they provide the U.S. assurances that they would grant self-government for Indochina, and form national armies for the Associated States. But it was clear throughout the war that, regardless of the amounts of U.S. assistance rendered, France's declarations of intent were grudgingly issued, and were seldom followed by action. The French Indochina war had to be lost before Vietnam was granted genuine independence.
- (4) Although France did expand its forces in Indochina, these forces were never sufficient to the task. French draftees were never employed in Indochina. France

continually pointed to its European defense posture in explanation. In at least one case, U.S. personnel were requested (e.g., as aircraft mechanics), and 200 were provided, when a pool of suitable personnel existed in Metropolitan France.

- (5) Statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the French did not ameliorate neo-mercantilism or other colonial policies, or provide "proper tutelage" to the Associated States; nor did it develop a command structure suitable to the United States.
- (6) The U.S. "checks to satisfy itself that the conditions" imposed were being satisfied, were, by and large, few and far between, and were conducted at the pleasure and within the specifications of the French.
- (7) The French chose not to refer Indochina to the United Nations. Certainly the U.S. assistance program bore on this decision; whether or not it was the deciding factor is unclear.

The effectiveness of the United States assistance program as an instrument of United States policy -- quite aside from the outcome of the war -- was thus quite low.

## 8. Critique

As earlier sections of this paper have suggested, the U.S. was persuaded to involve itself in the Indochina war by the perceived need, following the fall of Nationalist China, to hold a line against communists. This strategic drawing of the line at the Chinese-Indochina border was reinforced by the belief that the fall of Indochina would undoubtedly lead to the fall of the other mainland states of Southeast Asia, and that the fall of Southeast Asia would eventuate in the virtually complete denial to the United States of the Pacific Littoral of Asia. Prospects for a French victory in Indochina were assessed in contemporary U.S. intelligence documents as poor; nonetheless, the U.S. provided military and economic assistance to the French and the Associated States in the belief that a prompt, coordinated United States program of military, political, and economic aid offered some prospect that France might succeed in gaining the initiative in the struggle in that area. Six major points of critique of U.S. policy follow:

### a. The U.S. Misestimated France

U.S. policymakers apparently realized that the conditions they imposed upon the French were impracticable to some degree. Nonetheless, they believed that pre-conditions were necessary and could assist



in convincing the French to mend their colonial ways and to pursue the war with American methods, diligence, and aggressiveness. The French, long noted for proficiency and precision in logic, required no Descartes to realize that the United States was thus asking France (1) to regain full responsibility for the Indochina War, and in particular for fighting and taking casualties in that war; (2) to follow the "guidance" and "advice" of the United States on the exercise of this French responsibility; and (3) having fought the war, presumably to a successful conclusion, to relinquish control over Indochina. In view of the French willingness to retain responsibility for the war, it is not surprising that they were reluctant, at best, to accept propositions (2) and (3). Despite French pronouncements on their role in fighting communism, there is little reason to believe that they regarded the Indochina war in the same light as the U.S. viewed the Korean War. Rather, their behavior resembled that of other colonial powers who had fought to retain profitable colonies.

b. Slim Chance Accepted by the U.S.

Had U.S. policymakers recognized the slimness of the chance of persuading France to accept the three propositions specified above, they might have sought alternative courses of action in Indochina. As it was, the possibility (as opposed to the probability) of success was their prime consideration, and, overestimating U.S. leverage for influencing a favorable outcome, alternatives were not considered.

c. Circular U.S. Policy

Suppression of alternatives, both on the general and the particular level (see Note 48 for an example of the latter), led to a circularity in and reinforcement of existing policies -- constant forced choices between "bad" and "worse." 53/

d. Poor Bargaining

Having taken a hard policy line toward the French, the United States failed to bargain effectively. Thus, in circumstances not totally dissimilar from those prevailing in Vietnam in subsequent time periods, the U.S. continued to provide assistance disregarding infractions of pre-conditions; moreover, the pre-conditions for aid were not modified. Without modification, the conditions became worse than meaningless: standing testaments to U.S. impotence, to be recognized only when and how the French chose. The U.S. became virtually a prisoner of its own policy. Containment of communism, concern for the French in relation to the postwar Europe of NATO, EDC, and the Soviet threat in the West, combined with a fear, based on World War II strategy, that a French withdrawal from Indochina would leave exposed the U.S. flank in Korea, all compelled the U.S. to continue aid. Yet none of these considerations should have precluded modification of the U.S. bargaining strategy.

e. Misinformation

The U.S. policymaking machinery was highly vulnerable to spoofing, on at least three counts: (1) the very strength of the U.S.

position regarding communism must have been a constant temptation, not always resisted, for other parties to cry "red" and thus to manipulate the U.S.; (2) dependence on official French sources for intelligence and other information was potentially misleading; (3) reliance on the high-level mission technique for gathering information to be used as a direct input to policy decisions proved unsatisfactory. 54/

f. Costs Not Weighed

Finally, there is little indication that U.S. policymakers, their thoughts dominated by the objective of containing the monolithic communist bloc, faced up to the costs of winning the Indochina war, even while direct U.S. intervention was being considered. 55/ Nor does the evidence suggest that consideration was given to the tangible and intangible costs of providing U.S. military assistance to a power losing a war, including the potential impact on the U.S. position in Asia. And, finally, available documents fail to reveal any consideration given to the notion of sunk costs. There were, of course, voices in the wilderness. An unsigned, undated memorandum posed eight key questions to be answered by the NSC during the spring of 1954. 56/ Comment on the following four questions, in relation to the time at which they were raised, is unnecessary:

- Just how important is Southeast Asia to the security interests of the U.S.? Is the analysis in NSC 5405 still valid? Is the area important enough to fight for?
- How important is Indochina in the defense of Southeast Asia? Is the "domino theory" valid? Is Indochina important enough to fight for? If not, what are the strategic consequences of the loss of all or part of Indochina?
- If the U.S. intervenes in Indochina, can we count on the support of the natives? Can we fight as allies of the French and avoid the stigma of colonialism?
- Is there a strategic concept for the conduct of a war in Indochina which offers promise of early success...?

The decision of the United States to provide assistance to France and the Associated States during the Indochina War is usually treated lightly, if at all, in current histories. Yet, both the taking of the decision and its implementation were significant for and remarkably similar to subsequent U.S. experiences in Vietnam.



1. Department of State Circular to certain American diplomatic and consular officers, January 23, 1946. The association of the Netherlands East Indies with French Indochina could not have been lost on the French.
2. Department of State, Office of Far Eastern Affairs, Memo for Mr. Acheson from J.C.V., January 8, 1947.
3. Department of State outgoing telegram to AMEMB Paris 431, February 3, 1947 (SECRET).
4. Department of State outgoing telegram to AMEMB Paris 145, January 17, 1949 (SECRET).
5. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967, 2 vols), II, pp. 706-707.
6. Bernard B. Fall, ed., Ho Chi Minh on Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. 197-198.
7. Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of State, February 2, 1950.
8. Department of State Bulletin, May 22, 1950.
9. NSC 48/1, Report by the Executive Secretary, December 23, 1949, p. 3 (TOP SECRET).
10. Cf. McCarran bill, introduced February 25, 1949, to provide \$1.5 billion loan to Nationalist China, subsequent Bridges call for investigation of U.S.-China policy.
11. NSC 48/1, p. 13.
12. NSC 64, Report by the Department of State, February 7, 1950, p. 3 (TOP SECRET).
13. The French Assembly ratified the bill which in effect established the Associated States on January 29, 1950. The reasons for recognition advanced by the Secretary of State to the President are encouragement to national aspirations under non-communist leadership; establishment of stable non-communist governments in areas adjacent to Communist China; support to France; demonstration of displeasure with communist tactics. Department of State, Memorandum for the President from the Secretary, subject "U.S. Recognition of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia," February 2, 1950.

14. The import of Secretary Acheson's statement of February 1 is made clear by the first paragraph of the Department of State press release of that date: "The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of independence in Indochina..."
15. As President Truman was later to write concerning his view of Chinese operations in November 1950, "The situation in Korea...was not the only instance of a new aggressiveness on the part of Communist China. There was evidence that the communist rebel forces in Indochina were receiving increasing aid from Peiping. Also, in the last days of October, Communist China had moved against the ancient theocracy of Tibet. We were seeing a pattern in Indochina and Tibet timed to coincide with the attack in Korea as a challenge to the Western world." Memoirs of Harry S. Truman, Volume 2, p. 380.
16. On May 3, 1949, General Chennault told two Congressional Committees that unless the U.S. took immediate steps to save the Nationalists, all Asia would fall to the communists.
17. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, from Joint Chiefs of Staff, Subject: Strategic Assessment of Southeast Asia, April 10, 1950 (TS).
18. NSC 48, 64 series, 124 series, 177, 5405.
19. NSC 64, p.2.
20. NIE 5, Indochina: Current Situation and Probable Developments, December 29, 1950, p.2 (TS).
21. NIE 5, p. 2. Lucien Bodard in his The Quicksand War (pp. 228-229) contends that the French High Command "systematically put out false intelligence that was meant to end up in Washington" on this and related issues. Only subsequent events showed the French that there was a real Chinese threat.
22. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, April 5, 1950 (TS).
23. NIE 5, pp. 1, 2.
24. Ibid., p. 1.
25. See Department of State Outgoing Telegram to AM Consul Saigon 25, Personal for Jessup from Butterworth, January 20, 1950, "...marked opposition has been encountered which demonstrates at least that Bao Dai's popular support has not yet widened."
26. NIE 5, p. 1.

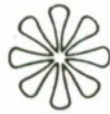


27. Department of State Incoming Telegram from Paris 837, February 22, 1950.
28. NSC 64, The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, February 27, 1950, p. 3 (TS).
29. Department of State letter from Deputy Under Secretary Rusk to Major General James H. Burns, March 7, 1950 (TS).
30. Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of Defense, approved by SecDef, March 6, 1950 (TS).
31. By March 6, State and Defense had agreed on a military assistance program for Indochina and Thailand in the amounts of \$15 and 10 million respectively. Draft memorandum to the President, "Allocation of Funds to Provide Military Assistance to Thailand and Indochina Under Section 303 of Mutual Defense Assistance Act, March 6, 1950 (TS).
32. Ninth Report to Congress of ECA, 1951, p. 99.
33. Quoted in Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from Secretary of the Navy, "Aid to Indochina," March 28, 1950, p. 2. (TS)
34. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Strategic Assessment of Southeast Asia," April 5, 1950 (TS).
35. Department of State Outgoing Telegram to AmEmbassy London 2049, May 3, 1950 (TS).
36. Statement of the President, June 27, 1950.
37. Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from Secretary of Defense, June 6, 1950. Cited in U.S. Policy Toward Vietnam Since 1945, OCMH Draft TS-62-5-3 (TS).
38. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Annex 2, October 16, 1950 (S); see also The U.S. Army Role in the Conflict in Vietnam, OCMH Draft TS-64-7-1 (TS), pp. 22-23; the generally pessimistic conclusions of the mission are also presented in Annex 2 to Southeast Asia Policy Committee "Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy in Indochina for NSC Consideration," October 11, 1950 (TS).
39. OCMH Draft TS-64-7-1, p. 23.
40. In their comment on this paper, the Joint Secretaries recommended strengthening this restriction by including in it the contingency of "augmented internal communist offensives." Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Secretaries, October 18, 1950 (TS).

41. Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Subject: Possible Future Action in Indochina, October 27, 1950 (TS).
42. Report to the National Security Council by the Secretary of Defense on the Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, December 21, 1950 (TS).
43. Department of State Incoming Message from U.S. Minister Saigon 763, November 4, 1950 (TS).
44. NSC Staff Study on Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, December 28, 1950 (TS).
45. Progress Report by the Under Secretary of State to the National Security Council on the Implementation of NSC 64, March 15, 1951 (TS).
46. OCMH TS-64-7-1, pp. 36, 47-48. All numbers are taken to be approximations.
47. Irving Heymont, et.al., Cost Analysis of Counterinsurgency Operations, RAC-TP-232, June 1967, Vol 1, p. 10 (S).
48. C.f., informal memorandum from Mr. Max Lehrer to General Bonesteel of April 21, 1954: "This [attached] report makes it clear that the U.S. MAAG has little information available on which it could operate. The written report actually understates the deficiencies in information. Our people find that the morale of the MAAG in Indochina is virtually non-existent and the MAAG is reduced to relative impotence."
49. Department of State Incoming Telegram from Paris 837, February 22, 1950 (S).
50. NIE 63-54, Consequences Within Indochina of the Fall of Dien Bien Phu, April 30, 1954 (S).
51. Regarding the Letourneau-Allard plan, General Trapnell, Chief MAAG, reported, "while this plan is slow and expensive, the other course of action is to accept a stalemate which is also not only expensive, but in the long run, favors the Viet Minh and offers no solution." (Memorandum from General Trapnell, OSD files, March 31, 1953)
52. Although General O'Daniel, in his report of July 15, 1953 (TS) waxed enthusiastic over the successor Navarre Plan, broadly and attractively described to him by General Navarre himself, it was clear to others that the plan was hollow. "There is no concrete evidence that the French Union forces will be able to take decisive action to win the war in the foreseeable future..." (Comments by Army Attache, Saigon, November 24, 1953 (S))



53. Thus the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1954: "There are two basic military concepts for the defense of Southeast Asia: a. Static type defense (Korea type). b. An offensive to attack the source of communist military power being applied in Southeast Asia [i.e., China]." It is interesting that in this assessment the Chiefs selected b., although "The force requirements and logistic support...have not been fully developed." Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Subject: "Defense of Southeast Asia in the Event of Loss of Indochina to the Communists," May 21, 1954 (TS).
54. C.f., the reports of General O'Daniel following his three missions to Indochina. Following the second mission, O'Daniel reported that "prospects for victory appear increasingly encouraging and I heartily recommend continuation and intensification of United States support." (Progress Report on Military Situation in Indochina as of November 19, 1953 (TS).) Following the third mission, which General Navarre tried unsuccessfully to prevent, O'Daniel was even more optimistic in his remarks, including those on Dien Bien Phu, given the circumstances. (Report of U.S. Special Mission to Indochina, February 5, 1954 (TS))
55. Secretary of the Army Robert T. Stevens found it necessary to write, even following the U.S. experiences of the Korean war, "I am becoming increasingly concerned over the frequency of statements by individuals of influence within and without the government that United States air and sea forces alone could solve our problem in Indochina, and equally so over the very evident lack of appreciation of the logistics factors affecting operations in that area." Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Indochina, May 19, 1954 (TS). See also Note 53.
56. NSC 5405 file of OSD.



# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV. A.3.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM  
1954 - 1956



THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM,  
1954-1956

Foreword

This section of the study traces chronologically relations among France, the U.S. and the State of Vietnam in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. The following are tabbed:

Summary

Chronology

Table of Contents and Outline

Footnotes

#### IV. A. 3.

### THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM 1954-1956

#### SUMMARY

Vietnam was the crucible of contemporary France. Military defeat by the Viet Minh -- unprecedented victory of Asian over European -- was but one political reagent: there was also intense frustration and disappointment among French of Rightist-colon convictions that sneaker-shod Asian peasants could undo a century of costly labor at France's "civilizing mission," and jeopardize the largest investment of French capital in the Far East. The Tonkin Delta region represented in a special way all that Vietnam meant to France. Tonkin, of all Vietnam, was where French economic stakes were highest, where the culture of France most completely overglossed indigenous ways, where stood educational focus of Vietnam -- the University of Hanoi, with its French faculty -- and where Catholicism flourished among the rural folk. Thus, evacuation of Tonkin per the dictates of the Geneva Settlement stung less from a sense of humiliation over Dien Bien Phu than from a sense of abandonment: an epoch had closed, France was demeaned.

Had the Geneva Settlement been fulfilled, France might have retained a presence and influence in Vietnam that would have mollified both the Right and Left. After all, no significant body of opinion in France held the French should continue to mold Vietnamese politics or that the French Expeditionary Corps should remain there undiminished -- the reality of the DRV and the exigencies of North Africa rendered such a position untenable. The Left and the Center were quite willing for France to withdraw under the Geneva formula; even the "Indochina" clique within the army recognized the priority of Algeria. But France in the end, at American instance, had to accept withdrawal without the cover of general elections, and to accede to a second, further, more final abandonment.

The supplanting of France by the U.S. in South Vietnam, and the failure of the Geneva Settlement, both well advanced by mid-1956, denied the French Left its prospects for cooperation with Ho Chi Minh in a precedent-setting experiment in coexistence. It disappointed moderates who had hoped to preserve French cultural influence and salvage French capital. It enraged Rightists who interpreted American policies in Vietnam invidiously. None of these factions was prepared to take a stand for France's staying, but all attempted to draw political sustenance from acerbic treatment of the U.S.



The whole episode of French withdrawal from Vietnam, in fact, soured the Western alliance. It is possible that France's rejection of the European Defense Community on August 30, 1954, may have been in part payment for Soviet good offices on behalf of France at Geneva. But it is certain that many French were persuaded that the U.S. and the UK furnished inadequate support to France during the latter phases of the war, and at the Conference. And it is equally certain that American policy in the aftermath of Geneva widely alienated affection for the U.S. in France, and created that lack of confidence which the Suez crisis of summer, 1956, translated into outright distrust.

After the Geneva Conference, all the governments involved in the Accords, with one significant exception, anticipated that France would remain in Vietnam. The exception was the State of Vietnam, whose Premier, Ngo Dinh Diem, was determined to uproot French influence as a concomitant to the establishment of a genuinely independent nationalist government. The policy of the United States was initially directed toward a partnership with France, a joint sponsorship of Diem and the newly independent nation he headed.

Almost at once, however, U.S. policy began to respond to military urgency, and this in turn caused the U.S. to move beyond partnership to primacy. In September of 1954, SEATO was brought into being, its protection extended to Vietnam by a protocol to the Manila Pact. The U.S. resolved through SEATO to balk further expansion of communist dominion, and looked to transforming Vietnam into a key redoubt in the line of containment. The U.S. was determined that Vietnam would become politically sound, economically self-sufficient, and militarily capable of providing for its own internal security, coping with invasion from North Vietnam, and contributing to the deterrent strength of the SEATO coalition. France, then beset with internal political divisions, and plagued with Algeria, evidenced doubt, indecision, and occasional reluctance in aiding Vietnam toward the foregoing objectives. The U.S. was not prepared to wait. In late September 1954, the U.S. cut out the French as middle-men in all its assistance for Vietnam, and began to deal directly with Diem, his government, and his armed forces.

France did not readily accept this enlarged American role, nor was there complete agreement with the U.S. Government that the

United States should pursue a further shouldering aside of France. Through the fall of 1954, France-U.S. relations worsened, and a policy debate developed in Washington. Once again, military considerations emerged as paramount. The JCS were originally opposed to the United States assuming responsibility for training the Army of Vietnam. They took the position, however, that if political considerations dictated such a U.S. involvement "the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training mission." On October 26, 1954, the Secretary of Defense, acting on behalf of the President, instructed the JCS to prepare a "long-range program for the organization and training of a minimum number of free Vietnam forces necessary for internal security." The development of this plan and an appropriate working relationship with the French continued into 1955, and necessitated the dispatch to Vietnam of General J. Lawton Collins, with Ambassadorial status, to obtain a tri-partite agreement acceptable in Saigon, in Paris, and in Washington. During November 1954, the JCS expressed serious reservations about the success of such a combined undertaking. Nevertheless, the NSC considered the policy sound, and this judgment was confirmed from the field by General Collins. Collins reported that:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps would be withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could be enacted.

Collins recommended that the United States continue military aid to France to "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces." In the meantime, events in Vietnam seemed to support those who, like the JCS, continued to entertain strong reservations about the future of Ngo Dinh Diem and his government. Diem managed to survive attempted coups by army leaders, and succeeded in maintaining an unhappy peace with the several armed factions of Cochinchina. But his political future remained questionable at best. At the same time, the French mission in Hanoi pressed hard to preserve French economic and cultural prerogatives in North Vietnam, and certain French political leaders in Paris spoke grandiloquently of a cooperative modus vivendi with the DRV becoming a model for east-west relations -- a disquieting message for the U.S. Secretary of State and those who shared his convictions within the Administration. Finally, parallel to these developments, the Emperor Bao Dai, retaliating for Diem's vituperative political campaign against him, actively sought to supplant Diem.

All the foregoing tension resolved to two central issues between the United States and France. The first was the question of how and by whom Vietnam's armed forces were to be trained. The second, and more far-reaching, was whether Ngo Dinh Diem was to remain at the head of Vietnam's government, or whether he was to be replaced by another



nationalist leader more sympathetic to Bao Dai and France. The first issue was resolved relatively quickly. General Collins struck an agreement with General Ely in Vietnam by which, despite serious misgivings in Paris, France agreed to turn over the training of the Vietnamese army to the U.S. and to withdraw French cadres. On February 12, 1955, the U.S. assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces, and the French disassociation began.

But the political controversy over Diem was less easily resolved. Diem exacerbated matters with increasingly vehement stricture against the French and Bao Dai. The United States on its part was insensitive to the impact within France of Diem's militant anti-communism -- frequently directed at the French Left -- and of the rancor aroused by U.S. statements portraying America as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. The U.S. did alert, however, to French statements that Diem was categorically incapable of unifying Vietnamese nationalists. French advice to the U.S. that Diem should, therefore, be replaced was seconded by Ambassador Collins from Vietnam. Throughout the winter and spring, Secretary Dulles and the Department of State in general seemed disposed to consider favorably suggestions that an alternative leader for the Vietnamese be placed in power. However, despite an ostensibly thorough search, no nationalist leader with qualities competitive with Diem's was identified.

Both the U.S. and France were then caught up in the sweep of events. The armed sects directly challenged Diem's authority, and he responded with force. An uneasy truce ended the first clash in March, and amid the mounting tension in April 1955, the U.S., France, and Bao Dai all sought actively to bring about a change in the GVN. On 28 April, Diem, against U.S. advice, against French advice, and against the advice of his cabinet, moved again against the sects. When Binh Xuyen resisted in Saigon, he committed the Vietnamese army to battle. Diem's forces won an immediate military victory, and simultaneously Diem's brother, Nhu, co-opted a committee of nationalist figures who called for Bao Dai's removal, and transfer of civil and military power to Diem.

Encouraged by Diem's success, the U.S. declared its unequivocal support for him as opposed to Bao Dai. The U.S. choice presented acute difficulties for France. The French Government was convinced that Nhu's "Revolutionary Committee" was under Viet Minh influence, and was strongly resentful of a renewed GVN campaign against French presence. In May 1955, France, the U.S., and Britain met in Paris to discuss European defense, but France promptly made Vietnam the principal agenda item. France maintained that the U.S., in backing Diem, forced upon France the necessity for withdrawing altogether from Vietnam. The French Foreign Minister Faure held that Diem was "not only incapable but mad . . . France can no longer take risks with him." Secretary Dulles in reply indicated that the U.S. was aware of Diem's weaknesses, but stressed



Diem's recent successes as indicating redeeming qualities. But, Dulles pointed out "Vietnam is not worth a quarrel with France," and offered U.S. withdrawal in preference to allied disunity. No decision was taken immediately, and during a recess Secretary Dulles received advice from the JCS that Diem seemed the most promising avenue to achievement of U.S. objectives, and that while withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," a precipitate withdrawal was to be prevented since it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual loss of South Vietnam to communism. Secretary Dulles then proposed to the French that they continue to support Diem until a national assembly were elected. British support for Diem seems to have swayed Faure, and he accepted Dulles' proposal. The tri-partite meeting ended on a note of harmony, but the undertones were distinct: the days of joint U.S.-French policy were over; thereafter, the U.S. would act independently of France in Vietnam.

Backed by the United States, Diem refused to open consultation with the North Vietnamese concerning general elections when the date for these fell due in July 1955. Pressing his military advantage against the sects, he moved to consolidate his position politically within South Vietnam. In October, he won a resounding victory in a popular referendum in which voters were given a choice between Diem and Bao Dai. As Diem's political strength grew, his relations with Paris deteriorated. In December 1955, Diem suddenly terminated the existing economic and financial agreements with France, and called upon France to denounce the Geneva agreements and break relations with Hanoi. Soon thereafter, he withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

On January 2, 1956, general elections in France produced a government under Socialist Guy Mollet, a third of the members of which were communists or avowed neutralists. In early March, Mollet's Foreign Minister, Pineau, declared in a speech to the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris that France would actively seek policy position bridging East and West, and that there was no unanimity of policy among the U.S., UK, and France. He cited UK Middle East policy and U.S. support for Diem as contrary to French interests, and condemned both powers for stirring up the Moslem world to France's distinct disadvantage in North Africa. A few days later, at a SEATO Council meeting in Karachi, Pineau proclaimed the end of the "era of aggression," and called for a "policy of coexistence."

Action followed Pineau's line. On March 22, 1956, France agreed with Diem to withdraw the FEC altogether. On April 26, 1956, the French High Command in Saigon was disestablished. On the due date for the general elections agreed to at Geneva, France possessed no military forces in Vietnam. And the date for the fulfillment of the political portions of the Settlement, July 1956, coincided with the inception of the Suez crisis.



IV. A. 3.

THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL  
FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 Jul 54	Diem appointed Premier of South Vietnam	Urged by America and France, Emperor Bao Dai named Ngo Dinh Diem premier of South (Free) Vietnam. Bao Dai remained legal, constitutionally recognized Chief of State.
21 Jul 54	Geneva Accords signed	France became guarantor of Vietnamese sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7); with the PAVN, guarantor of armistice agreements (Geneva Agreements, Articles 22, 23), and all-Vietnam elections (Conference Final Declaration, Article 7) France agreed to withdraw the French Expeditionary Corps at the request of local governments (Conference Final Declaration, Article 10, Unilateral Declaration, France)
8, 12 Aug 54; 20 Aug 54	National Security Council meetings; NSC 5429/2	US policies toward post-Geneva Vietnam. Economic: disassociate France from levers of command, integrate land reform with refugee resettlement, work with the French but "encourage" them to turn over financial, administrative, economic controls to the Vietnamese. Give aid directly to the Vietnamese -- not through France. Military: work with France only insofar as necessary to build up indigenous military forces able to provide internal security. Political: France must grant total independence (including right to

withdraw from French Union) to South Vietnam and support a strong indigenous government. Diem must broaden the governmental base, elect an assembly, draft a constitution and legally dethrone Bao Dai. French support and co-operation for these policies was necessary; retention of the FEC was essential to South Vietnamese security.

Aug 54

#### Sainteny Mission

Jean Sainteny was sent to Hanoi to find ways to protect French economic and cultural interests in the DRV. Political overtones of the mission annoyed the US and General Paul Ely, High Commissioner in the South. Ely received firm assurance from Mendes-France that France was not playing a "double game", has not sent Sainteny for political bridge-building purposes. Mendes-France reaffirmed French support for an independent, strong South Vietnam.

8 Sep 54

#### Manila Pact Signed

Dulles' anti-communist military alliance was realized in SEATO. The Associated States of Indochina were covered by separate protocol ensuring collective defense by SEATO nations in case of subversion or aggression.

27-29 Sep 54

#### Washington Conference

France agreed to support Diem (against the French belief that Diem would prove unable to unify or stabilize the country); agreed to keep the FEC in South Vietnam but received no indication of possible US financial aid for the French forces. France knew economic and military aid would be given directly to Vietnam but was led to believe she would have a hand in its distribution by ambiguous US-drafted statements. The US military role in Vietnam was



		not discussed because of a State-JCS split (Dulles wanted to assume training responsibilities; JCS did not because of political instability, presence of French troops and Geneva restrictions).
22 Oct 54	NSC Action Program	The US decided to take firmer steps to strengthen Diem, to tell Paris that French support had been inadequate. An earlier JCS concession to consider a training program for the NVA opened the way for the decision to inaugurate a "limited" US role in military affairs.
24 Oct 54	Eisenhower letter to Diem	Announced direct economic aid and military assistance from the US; demanded no Vietnamese moves as reciprocation for aid. France called it a <i>carte americaine</i> , said it violated the principle of joint action adopted in September.
8 Nov 54	Collins Mission	General J. Lawton Collins, given broad authority to coordinate all US programs and -- with French support -- get things moving, arrived in Vietnam.
13 Dec 54	Collins-Ely Minute of Understanding	France will grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1955, the US will assume training responsibilities, the US MAAG, Indochina, will direct the training program -- under General Ely's overall authority. French and US instructors will be phased out as VNA efficiency increases. Washington approved the Minute; Paris objected, particularly to the phase-out of French trainers. France did not relent and consent until 11 February 1955.

16 Dec 54	Collins recommends Diem be replaced	Diem's failure to include Dr. Quat in the cabinet as Defense Minister confirmed Collins' doubts about Diem's capacity to stabilize the government, or rally support for his regime. He recommended Bao Dai's return be considered, but if this were unacceptable, recommended the US withdraw from Vietnam.
19 Dec 54	Trilateral Meetings, Paris (U.K., U.S., France)	Mendes-France insisted the time had come to consider an alternative to Diem. Recommended Collins and Ely study the problem and come up with suggestions for a change by mid-January. France felt Bao Dai should be involved in an alternative plan. Dulles: Diem is the only suitable leader but we will consider alternatives and will allow Collins and Ely to consider the matter. But Dulles made it clear that Congress would probably not appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. U.S. study of alternatives was cursory, however; Dulles was sure Diem could succeed, with proper direction; he was more sure that no other possible leader existed.
20 Jan 55	Collins' report to NSC	December's despair over Diem had dissipated; Diem had acted well on a few matters. Collins recommended continued support for Diem because without it South Vietnam will surely fall to communism and the rest of other Southeast Asia will soon follow. The NSC approved Collins' report.
12 Feb 55	Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) opens	General O'Daniel, under Ely's general supervision, took charge of programs to train and reorganize the VNA along American lines. Despite friction between French and Americans in Saigon and despite Paris-Washington disputes, officers



in TRIM seemed able to rise above differences and initiate sound programs for the VNA.

22 Feb 55	United Front announced	French subsidies to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect armies -- about 40,000 men -- ended in February. When Diem refused to meet sect requests for financial aid, integration of forces into the VNA and recognition of spheres of influence, previous sect cooperation with Diem ceased. Representatives of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Dan Xa (Ba Cut), Lien Minh (Thinh Minh The) and Binh Xuyen (Bay Vien) forces met at Tay Ninh, agreed to work together against Diem. Cao Dai Pope Tac headed the group.
21 Mar 55	United Front "ultimatum"	Claiming to speak for the popular will, the United Front asked that Diem form a government of national union and make other political, economic, military reforms. Diem called this an ultimatum and refused to consider the request. The Front then sent an emissary to Bao Dai asking him to intervene on its behalf. Bao Dai refused.
29-30 Mar 55	Diem attacks central police headquarters	Brewing for months, the fight finally broke between Diem and the Binh Xuyen (a coalition of gangsters and river pirates which ran gambling and prostitution in Cholon, and the Saigon-Cholon police, paid Bao Dai for his protection and enjoyed some French support). A company of paratroopers took over the central police station, driving the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Diem then wanted to go after Police Commissioner Sang and end Binh Xuyen control. Defense Minister Minh resigned when Diem refused to consult the cabinet over this. However, French representations

dissuaded Diem from taking on Bay Vien's 6000-man force at this time, and the French then negotiated a truce between Diem and the Binh Xuyen.

7 Apr 55

Collins and Ely agree Diem must go

Collins says Diem has proved himself incapable of inspiring unity, and must be replaced. Dulles demurs, then agrees to consider a change if Collins will fly to Washington for consultations.

23 Apr 55

Diem proposes to broaden the government

Diem calls for a national referendum and elections for a national assembly within six months. The Front scores the proposal.

26 Apr 55

Diem fires Sang

(Collins had left Saigon for Washington.) Diem replaces Sang with a man loyal to his regime but Sang refuses to resign saying only Bao Dai had the legal authority to remove him.

27 Apr 55

Dulles agrees to a change in Saigon

Collins met with Dulles in Washington. Dulles agreed to consider an alternate to Diem but was determined to keep this from the French until their purposes were clear and their promise to unequivocally support a new regime firm. Saigon was informed of this new policy.

28 Apr 55

Diem hits the Binh Xuyen

Diem struck at the Surete--and Sang--after fighting erupted between the VNA and Binh Xuyen forces in Cholon. The French said Diem instigated the fight; Americans supported Diem's version that the Binh Xuyen began firing first. Whatever its origin, the fight ended with a VNA victory. The Binh Xuyen were driven out of Cholon into the Rung Sat swamps.



30 Apr 55	Revolutionary Congress Announced	Diem's brother Nhu had a hand in organizing this broad amalgam of political interests behind a program calling for support of Diem against the Binh Xuyen, sects and Bao Dai, in favor of broad representation in the government. Generals Thé and Phuong, tired of the "weak" Revolutionary Congress, formed a Revolutionary Committee whose outlook was more anti-Bao Dai and anti-French than the Congress. Present and former Vietminh supporters were members of the Congress and Committee.
1 May 55	Bao Dai's ultimatum	Bao Dai summoned Diem to replace the Army Chief of Staff with his own man. Diem ignored the summons and orders.
1 May 55	The US: back on the track behind Diem	Because of Diem's victory -- superficial though it may have been -- over the Binh Xuyen, because of VNA support for Diem, Dulles canceled the cable of 28 April: again, the US will support Diem.
8 May 55	A National Campaign launched	Diem announced a national campaign to regain "wayward" provinces and unify the country. Or: he declared war on the sects. The VNA fought over a year against Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen forces, but finally established control over them, over areas of sect influence and control.
8-11 May 55	Tripartite Talks, Paris	Faure: We cannot support Diem -- but Vietnam is not worth a split in Franco-American relations. Therefore, France offers to withdraw from Vietnam. Dulles: We must support Diem. But if a US withdrawal would prevent discord, the US will consider it. Then, after hearing JCS and Collins' arguments against either precipitate French withdrawal or a US withdrawal, Dulles urged Faure to accept a new proposal: support

Diem a while longer on the grounds that he will broaden the government and call for elections. Faure agreed -- against his own wishes and against strong popular pressure and on several conditions (most of which required action from Diem and which Dulles could not guarantee). Dulles then suggested France and the US apprise each other of policy and actions but pursue them more independently than in the past. The days of joint policy -- of togetherness in Vietnam -- were over.

July 1955

Diem refuses to meet with the DRV about elections

France and Britain urged Diem to hold consultations with Hanoi for all-Vietnam elections, as stipulated in the Geneva Accords. The US suggested consultations but also suggested Diem request firm guarantees (for secret ballot, UN or international supervision) which the DRV was expected to reject. But Diem refused to meet with the North Vietnamese. He had not signed the Geneva accords and denied being bound by them in any way.

24 Oct 55

National Referendum

With 98 percent of the vote, Diem became President of the Republic of Vietnam--and Bao Dai was dethroned.

Aug-Dec 1955

Franco-Vietnamese Conferences

Diem wanted renegotiation of economic and financial accords reached in 1954; transfer of Vietnamese affairs from the ministry of the associated states to the Foreign Office; abolition of Ely's former post of High Commissioner; termination of the military High Command and Vietnamese authority over remaining French troops in Vietnam. (The FEC now numbered about 35,000 -- vice the 150,000-man force which France spoke of retaining in Viet-



nam during the September 1954 Washington Conference). France could not accept Diem's last demand; had difficulty satisfying the others, but finally made major concessions. Diem's response was to withdraw Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly.

26 Apr 56

French High  
Command abolished

Only about 5,000 French troops remained in Vietnam; most French instructors had left TRIM. A French liaison mission with the ICC still functioned, however, and France still served on the Joint Armistice Commission with DRV military representatives.

July, 1956

All-Vietnam  
elections

Diem had refused to consult with the DRV about elections in 1955; he refused to hold them in 1956. Diem did agree to take over the French responsibility to support the ICC; France would continue to finance ICC operations. The Joint Armistice Commission gradually died of inactivity.

#### KEY AMERICAN PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

20 Jan 53 - President: Dwight D. Eisenhower  
 20 Jan 61 Secretary of State: John Foster Dulles  
 Secretary of Defense: Charles E. Wilson  
 Ambassador to Vietnam: Donald R. Heath (25 Jun 52-20 Apr 55);  
 Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Special Mission (8 Nov 54-6 May 55);  
 G. Frederick Reinhart (20 Apr 55-14 Mar 57)  
 Chairman, JCS: Arthur W. Radford, Adm., USN (14 Aug 53-15 Aug 57)  
 Chief MAAG, Indochina:  
 John W. O'Daniel, Lt. Gen., USA (31 Mar 54-23 Oct 55);  
 Samuel T. Williams, Lt. Gen., was 1st Chief of MAAG to  
 Vietnam (24 Oct 55-31 Aug 60)

#### KEY FRENCH PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Jun 54 - Prime Minister: Pierre Mendes-France  
 Feb 55 Foreign Minister: Georges Bidault  
 Minister for Associated States: Guy La Chambre  
 Minister for National Defense: Rene Pleven  
 High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Paul Ely  
  
 23 Feb 55 - Prime Minister: Edgar Faure  
 31 Jan 56 Foreign Minister: Antoine Pinay  
 Minister for Associated States: M. La Forest  
 Minister for National Defense: General Pierre Koenig  
 High Commissioner, Vietnam: General Ely's post abolished  
 after his departure, June 1955. (Gen. Jacquot assumed  
 military responsibilities until April, 1956)  
 Ambassador, Vietnam: Henri Hoppenot (July, 1955)  
  
 31 Jan 56 - Prime Minister: Guy Mollet  
 16 Apr 57 Foreign Minister: Christian Pineau  
 Minister for National Defense: Maurice Bourges-Maunouvry  
 High Commissioner, Vietnam: (General Jacquot - military  
 responsibilities until April 1956)  
 Ambassador, Vietnam: M. Payart (November, 1956)

#### KEY SOUTH VIETNAMESE PERSONALITIES: 1954-1956

Mar 49 - Head of State: Bao Dai, Emperor  
 26 Oct 55  
  
 12 Jan 54 - Head of State: Bao Dai  
 16 Jun 54 Premier: Prince Buu Loc  
 Minister for Foreign Affairs: Nguyen Quoc Dinh  
  
 7 Jul 54 - Head of State: Ngo Dinh Diem (President: 23 Oct 55)  
 1 Nov 63 Premier: Ngo Dinh Diem  
 Minister for Foreign Affairs: Tran Van Do (Jul 54 - May 55)  
 Vu Van Mau (Jul 55 - Nov 63)  
 Minister for National Defense: Ngo Dinh Diem (General Minh  
 served temporarily, early 1955).



THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM,  
1954-1956

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THE U.S. AND FRANCE'S WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM, 1954-1956

A. Introduction: Post-Geneva Expectations

1. France Will Stay in Vietnam

After 100 years of investment, interest and influence, France got out of Vietnam in less than a year after the Geneva Conference of July 1954. And France did not want to leave. On July 25, three days after signing the Geneva Accords, Prime Minister Mendes-France said France would maintain cultural and economic ties with North Vietnam and would assist the development of Free (South) Vietnam. 1/ The predecessor Laniel Government had recognized "Vietnam as a fully independent and sovereign state in possession of all qualifications and powers known in international law" on June 4, 1954; Mendes-France pledged to uphold and further that treaty. 2/ In August he announced a three-phase formula to implement it. Economic, administrative and financial ties with the Associated States would be terminated as fast as possible. 3/ By December 1954, the last vestiges of the French colonial apparatus had been eliminated. 4/ However, Mendes-France's formula viewed membership in the French Union as compulsory -- indicative of French desire to stay in Vietnam but inimical to demands lodged by Diem and the United States for independence which included the right to withdraw from the French Union. 5/

Also in August, General Paul Ely, French High Commissioner in Vietnam, reaffirmed French support of Vietnamese independence and French readiness to further Vietnamese development. That the French had a role to play was clear: French economic investment, cultural institutions, military, political and administrative operations were already part of South Vietnamese life. That France must play a role was also clear. Under the Geneva Accords, France had pledged to guarantee all-Vietnam elections in 1956, guarantee execution of the armistice agreement, guarantee Vietnamese sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, pledged to maintain the French Expeditionary Corps until Vietnam requested its removal. General Ely had been delegated extensive political and military authority to enable him to meet these obligations. He worked sincerely to persuade both Vietnamese and French that mutual cooperation would be mutually beneficial, to erase the colonialist tinge of French presence, to both speed and smooth the French transition from master to equal partner of Vietnam. 6/



## 2. Diem: France Will Leave South Vietnam

In this endeavor, Ely received qualified support from French officials, "colons" and military officers in Vietnam. He received sporadic support from Paris. He received almost no support from the Vietnamese. France was not welcome in Vietnam for many reasons, a major one being Premier Ngo Dinh Diem. A Francophobe of the first order, Diem wanted full independence for South Vietnam and wanted France out of the country as soon as possible. Many shared Diem's sentiments. France had just lost a long, devastating and demoralizing war against Vietnamese communists as well as Vietnamese nationalists. French colonial rule had been tight, previous French promises of independence had been broken. Why believe professions of French good intentions in 1954 were any different from those of the past? Added to this was the problematical relationship of France vis-a-vis South Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. Some South Vietnamese expected France to actively work toward accommodation with the Viet Minh and reunification of North and South under Viet Minh direction. Many more felt the fact of continued French presence alone compromised South Vietnamese independence. "To convince the people of Vietnam that the administration was independent, it became a political necessity to be anti-colonial and specifically anti-French." 6a/

## 3. The U.S. Will "Join" France in South Vietnam

Finally, France was not alone in Vietnam. More than Diem, more than the psychological damage done by colonial years, the United States made life in Vietnam difficult for France. The U.S. was eager to strengthen Vietnam, needed and demanded French cooperation, but offered little in return. U.S. policy insisted upon an immediate and dramatic transformation of French policy. But the U.S. little understood what this meant to France, what problems it created for French domestic and foreign policy or what U.S. concessions might help effect the transformation.

Although remnants of the French Expeditionary Corps remained until 1956, France was out of Vietnam to all intents and purposes by May 1955, ten months after Geneva. These months are characterized by professions of Franco-American cooperation but demonstrations of Franco-American division, characterized by conflict of word and action on several levels. Paris said one thing but did another, Paris said one thing and French officials in Saigon did the opposite; Washington activities were not always in line with Washington pronouncements and the gulf between the thought and deed of Ngo Dinh Diem only compounded an already sensitive situation. It is during this period that Diem established his rule, against French advice and

best interests but with almost unwavering support from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. And it is the period during which the anti-communist moralism of Dulles and Diem rejected any rapprochement with the North, ultimately ensuring that the temporary military demarkation line would become a permanent division of Vietnam.

#### B. Initial U.S. Policy Toward Indochina

The U.S. began revising policy toward Indochina as the Geneva Conference closed. The exercise was marked by urgency dictated by the belief that Geneva had been a disaster for the free world. Geneva gave Communist China and North Vietnam a new base for exploitation of Southeast Asia; it enhanced Peking's prestige to Washington's dismay and detriment; it restricted free world room to maneuver in Southeast Asia. And its grant of Vietnamese territory above the seventeenth parallel to the communist Ho Chi Minh was a painful reminder of the scarifying French defeat by the Viet Minh, the first defeat of a European power by Asians (Asian communists at that), a defeat shared by the United States to the tune of more than \$1.5 billion in economic and military assistance granted France and the Associated States of Indochina. 7/

##### 1. SEATO: The New Initiative?

The first step toward countering this disaster had been discussed with Britain and France since the spring of 1954, and Walter Bedell Smith's comment as Geneva closed, "We must get that pact!", heralded its inauguration. 8/ The Southeast Asian Collective Defense Treaty was to be a "new initiative in Southeast Asia" to protect the U.S. position in the Far East and stabilize "the present chaotic situation . . . to prevent further losses to communism" through subversion or overt aggression. 9/ But the Manila Pact, signed on September 8, 1954, proved to be neither the new initiative nor the strong anti-communist shield called for by Secretary Dulles. Vice Admiral A. C. Davis, deputy assistant secretary and Defense Department representative at Manila, reported the Pact left Southeast Asia "no better prepared than before to cope with Communist aggression." 10/ The failure was largely of American making. While Dulles wanted to put the communists on notice that aggression would be opposed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted the United States must not be committed financially, militarily or economically to unilateral action in the Far East and that U.S. freedom of action must not be restricted. 11/ The two objectives conflicted and one cancelled out the other. Thus, Article IV of the treaty, the mechanism for collective action in case of enemy threat, did not pledge automatic response with force to force. Instead, each signatory promised to "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." The United States,



particularly Mr. Dulles, tried to put teeth into SEATO through unilateral declarations of U.S. readiness to act. Dulles defined the obligations under Article IV as "a clear and definite agreement on the part of the signatories, including the United States, to come to the aid of any member of the Pact who under the terms of this treaty is subjected to aggression." 12/ However, Dulles failed to instill the same dedication to instant intervention in the other SEATO members.

The obligation assumed at Manila emphasized the importance attached to Southeast Asia by the U.S. Government. U.S. refusal to pledge unqualified support to Indochina emphasized the need for indigenous strength and stability in the area to counter communist power, to make infiltration and aggression less appetizing to the enemy. Of the three Indochina states, most important yet least stable and least strong was South Vietnam. Thus, the second step in policy development was to decide what the U.S. could do to change the situation, a decision which turned on what France could or would do in South Vietnam.

## 2. Alternative French Policies

That France and the United States would eventually part company over Vietnam might have been predicted in August 1954, when U.S. policy toward Vietnam was drawn. Formulae for economic, military and especially political courses of action were different from -- often antithetical to -- French objectives and interests.

The U.S. intelligence community felt if France "acted swiftly to insure Vietnam full independence and to encourage strong nationalist leadership . . . anti-French nationalist activity might be lessened (and) with French military and economic assistance -- backed by U.S. aid -- the Vietnamese could proceed to develop gradually an effective security force, local government organization and a long range program for economic and social reform." 13/ But there were three other routes or combinations of routes open to France in post-Geneva Vietnam. France could work to maintain French Union ties, indirect French political control and economic domination rather than grant full independence to Vietnam. Or, France could try to reach an agreement with the Viet Minh, expedite elections and achieve a unified country in which French cultural, economic and political interests could be maintained. A fourth possibility, thought likely only if the situation deteriorated to the point of hopelessness, was a French decision to withdraw all military, economic and administrative support from Indochina. 14/

Of the four courses of action open to France, three were rejected by the Eisenhower Administration. Continuation of French Union ties plus indirect French controls would be impossible under Diem,

whose anti-French feeling ran deep, who had not in the past and would not now accept anything less than complete freedom from France. And Diem had American backing. Dulles believed "the kind of thing he stands for" is the "necessary ingredient of success" and called the Diem government the "nucleus for future efforts." 15/ Accommodation with the Viet Minh was anathema to both Diem and the U.S. Although American policy spoke of taking steps to prevent the complete absorption of the DRV into the Soviet bloc, those steps amounted to nothing more than maintenance of a U.S. consulate in Hanoi. 16/ Dulles in particular could not see Ho Chi Minh as Asia's Tito and refused to deal with him, thereby crushing Mendes-France's hope that Vietnam could become an experiment in peaceful coexistence. 17/ The U.S. was equally determined to prevent the quick withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam. It was believed:

in the last analysis, Vietnamese security will be determined by the degree of French protection and assistance in the development of a national army,

plus Vietnamese energies and the will of other powers to guarantee Vietnamese security. 18/

Thus, United States policy required France to grant full Vietnamese independence quickly and to support a strong indigenous political regime, to maintain French military presence but reduce military, economic and political controls. Basic guidance determined at National Security Council meetings on August 8 and 12 became NSC 5429/2, issued on August 20.

### 3. U.S. Objectives in Vietnam: Political, Economic, Military

The American formula for government in free Vietnam rested on three legs. Independence was first and more important. France must treat South Vietnam as an independent sovereign nation and the U.S. would deal with it on that basis. Full independence was the only way to win nationalist support away from the Viet Minh, and nationalist support was thought to be essential to successful government in South Vietnam. Secondly, the U.S. would urge Ngo Dinh Diem to establish a government of national union representative of dominant elements on the political scene. After bringing some stability to the nation, a Constituent Assembly would be called and a constitution drafted to herald the legal dethroning of Emperor Bao Dai and inauguration of democracy. 19/ Finally, the formula demanded firm French and U.S. support for Diem. Despite his rigidity, his penchant for a one-man show and his inability to communicate or deal with people, Diem was a nationalist untainted by past association with either Viet Minh or French. This quality, plus full independence, plus Franco-American



backing and encouragement for broad reform ultimately would result in a strong anti-communist South Vietnam. Or so the U.S. thought.

U.S. determination to back Diem was made with the knowledge that French support for him was hardly enthusiastic. Guy La Chambre, Minister for the Associated States, faulted Diem on three essential points: Diem would oppose a representative government, oppose agrarian reform and refuse to depose Bao Dai and create a republic. La Chambre expected a new government would be necessary to give South Vietnam a chance of winning the 1956 elections. 20/

America's economic policy for South Vietnam was designed to yield immediate political advantage, cope with the staggering distortion of Vietnamese economic life and ease France out of economic affairs. U.S. planners believed integration of land reform measures with refugee resettlement would fill a triple bill: surplus land distributed among the thousands of refugees would invite their political support, facilitate assimilation of Tonkinese with Cochinese and bring the land to full productivity. Aid would be given directly to Vietnam as befitting its independence and as a means to accelerate the "disassociation of France from (economic) levers of command." 21/ French domination in this area, it was thought, stifled Vietnamese efforts and contradicted Vietnamese independence. It also inhibited American economic interests. Militarily, the U.S. would build up "indigenous military forces necessary for internal security . . . working through the French only insofar as necessary." 22/ Exactly how indigenous forces would be developed was not decided until December 1954, because France had some ideas about what to do and the Joint Chiefs of Staff differed with State Department opinions as to the kind of U.S. involvement required.

#### 4. The U.S. "Chooses" Policy for France

In effect, these policy decisions of August 1954 asked Mendes-France to overcome "French traditional interests and emotions which have in the past governed the implementation of policy in Indochina." They asked for -- or demanded -- a "dramatic transformation in French policy" because policy makers believed this was necessary to "win the active loyalty and support of the population for a South Vietnamese Government." 23/ The U.S. asked France to stay in Vietnam militarily, to get out of Vietnamese economic and political life, but at the same time Washington asked for French support and cooperation in implementing U.S. programs. This was probably asking too much.

By December, the U.S. no longer asked for French support but demanded it. By December, the qualified U.S. commitment to Diem had hardened, U.S. involvement in Vietnam had deepened and U.S.

activities there either dominated or simply excluded the French. Several forces converged to produce this change in U.S. policy. Resolution of differences within the Eisenhower Administration on military issues opened the way for U.S. assumption of responsibilities in what had been an exclusively French preserve. The belief that Diem for all his failings and weaknesses was the only available leader for South Vietnam, and that he needed stronger U.S. and French support to quell opponents and speed development led to the creation of programs designed to provide that strong support.

Finally, the U.S. believed France had not done enough for Diem, believed the schizophrenic French policy of professing support while acting to undermine Diem's regime was largely to blame for Vietnamese difficulties. This resulted in demands that France live up to her promises. It made unilateral American efforts more attractive -- French assistance might not be available in any case -- and it inspired a feeling that Americans had to do more because the French were doing so little.

### C. Tentative U.S. Involvement Becomes Deeper, Firmer

#### 1. Adoption of Military Responsibilities

Authorization for General John (Iron Mike) O'Daniel, Chief of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, to take up the task of training the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) was long in coming. General O'Daniel and French General Ely had discussed U.S. participation in training in June 1954; O'Daniel drew up a comprehensive plan for advisory assistance at all levels of the military establishment and in July begged the U.S. to beef up the MAAG staff before August 11, when the Geneva prohibition against introduction of new military personnel went into effect. 24/ But the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected.

#### a. The JCS Arguments Against U.S. Training the VNA

Early in August, the JCS listed four preconditions essential to the success of a U.S. training effort in Indochina, preconditions which should be met before training obligations were assumed. First:

It is absolutely essential that there be a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control. It is hopeless to expect a US military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of armed forces.



Secondly, that government "should formally request that the United States assume responsibility for training . . . forces and providing the military equipment, financial assistance and political advice necessary to insure internal stability." The Chiefs saw no role in training for the French; the third precondition called for complete French withdrawal from the country:

Arrangements should be made with the French granting full independence to the Associated States and providing for the phased, orderly withdrawal of French forces, French officials and French advisors from Indochina in order to provide motivation and a sound basis for the establishment of national armed forces. The United States from the beginning should insist on dealing directly with the governments of the respective Associated States, completely independent of French participation or control.

Finally, both "local military requirements and the over-all US interests should dictate the size and composition of indigenous forces."

25/

#### b. Dulles' Views

Of the four preconditions, only the second presented no problem. The State Department, notably Secretary Dulles, Walter F. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, and Kenneth T. Young, head of an interdepartmental Vietnam Task Force, objected to the other three stipulations. Dulles outlined his thinking in a letter of August 18 to Defense Secretary Charles Wilson. Agreeing that the Diem government "is far from strong or stable" Dulles pointed out that reorganization and retraining of the army was "one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong." Calling this "the familiar hen-and-egg argument as to which comes first," Dulles made his preference clear. He saw two courses of action open to the United States:

one, to strengthen the government by means of a political and economic nature and the other, to bolster that government by strengthening the army which supports it.

Dulles wished to adopt both courses.

As for the question of French presence or absence, Dulles said:

It would be militarily disastrous to demand the withdrawal of French forces from Vietnam before the creation

of a new National Army. However . . . there would seem to be no insuperable objection to the U.S. undertaking a training program . . . while at the same time the French Forces commence a gradual phasing out from that theater. 26/

c. The NSC Backs Dulles

Adoption of NSC 5429/2 indicates the U.S. Government found Dulles' views more persuasive than those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But while it was agreed to "work through the French only insofar as necessary" to build up indigenous forces, the program for bolstering the Vietnamese army was not developed for several months.

d. JCS-State Split on Force Level, Mission for VNA

On September 22, in a memorandum recommending establishment of a MAAG, Cambodia (if "all French advisors ultimately" are withdrawn, if the U.S. deals directly with Phnom Penh and if these caveats are written into a bilateral agreement with Cambodia), the JCS recommended against assignment of training responsibilities to the Saigon MAAG because of the "unstable political situation" in South Vietnam. 27/ Instability was noted "with concern" by the JCS in a second September 22 memorandum dealing with development of forces in Indochina, as was the cease-fire agreement (called "a major obstacle to the introduction of adequate US MAAG personnel and of additional arms and equipment"). 28/ Because of these factors, the Chiefs considered "this is not a propitious time to further indicate United States intentions with respect to the support and training of Vietnamese forces."

But the JCS had been directed by the NSC to address the question of Vietnamese force levels; against their best wishes, one supposes, this memorandum forwarded their views. A 234,000-man army was proposed for Vietnam; the annual cost of training and maintaining this force -- assuming France turned over to the VNA arms and equipment furnished under the U.S. Military Development Assistance Program since 1950 -- was put at \$420 million. Another \$23.5 million would be needed to train and equip the Navy and Air Forces. Further, the JCS wanted speedy relinquishment of French over-all command of the VNA and speedy withdrawal of French forces as the Vietnamese "are capable of exercising command of an effective force." Finally, the JCS requested "a definite agreement . . . be obtained from the French Government with respect to the timing of their programmed phased withdrawal" before U.S. assumption of training responsibilities. 29/

Dulles objected to these proposals:



It seems to me that the mission of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces should be to provide internal security. The manpower and cost estimates (of the JCS) would seem to be excessive in the above context.

The Secretary called a French request of \$330 million to support the French Expeditionary Corps, then expected to number 150,000 men through 1955, and the Vietnamese plan to keep 230,000 men under arms " . . . beyond what the United States should consider feasible to support for maintaining the security of free Indochina at this time." Instead, he called it "imperative" that the U.S. Government -- e.g., the JCS -- "prepare a firm position on the size of the forces we consider a minimum level to assure the internal security of Indochina."

30/

A week later the Chiefs in turn objected. The idea of training the VNA for internal security contradicted NSC 162/2 which "envisages reliance on indigenous ground forces to the maximum extent possible" in territorial defense. Citing the threat from "considerable numbers of Viet Minh guerrillas and sympathizers . . . known to be or suspected of being within the territory of free Vietnam" and the GVN "intention of requesting the phased withdrawal of the French forces by 1956" the Chiefs said:

This would result in a complete military vacuum unless the Vietnamese are adequately prepared to take over progressively as the French withdraw.

The force levels recommended on September 22 were reaffirmed as "the minimum required ultimately to carry out the . . . objectives" of the VNA, which should be "to attain and maintain internal security and to deter Viet Minh aggression by a limited defense of the Geneva Armistice demarkation line." The JCS pointed again to the unstable political situation in Vietnam, the 342-man MAAG ceiling and concluded:

Under these conditions, US participation in training not only would probably have but limited beneficial effect but also would assume responsibility for any failure of the program. In light of the foregoing and from a military point of view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the United States should not participate in the training of Vietnamese forces in Indochina. However, if it is considered that political considerations are overriding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG, Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training effort. 31/

e. Again, the NSC Backs Dulles, Recommends a U.S. Military Program in South Vietnam

Political considerations were overriding. The JCS concession to consider training the Vietnamese for internal security alone coincided with deliberations in the Operations Coordinating Board over possible ways in which to strengthen the Diem regime. A crash program had been outlined by State, part of which was a limited interim training program recommended by the OCB. Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed this would set in motion the long-range training program proposed by General O'Daniel in June; he still believed that program should not be adopted. But before the JCS could consider or suggest revisions to the OCB proposal, the National Security Council met on October 22 and approved a joint State-Defense message to Saigon authorizing Ambassador Donald Heath and O'Daniel to "collaborate in setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese Forces." 32/ The JCS were directed to recommend force levels necessary to "accomplish the military objective merely of the maintenance of internal security." 33/

Responding on November 17, the JCS proposed a force of 89,085 at an estimated cost of \$193.1 million for Fiscal Year 1956 and approximately \$100 million for the remainder of FY 1955. To provide internal security and "in an attempt to stabilize the Diem government" the JCS suggested prompt reduction in force and prompt reassignment of selected personnel and units to maintain "the security of the legal government in Saigon and other major population centers," execute "regional security operations in each province" and perform "territorial pacification missions." Later, military centers would be established for reorganization and training of the military.

The Chiefs expressed serious reservations about the probability of Vietnamese -- and American -- success. First,

the chaotic internal political situation within Vietnam is such that there is no assurance that the security forces visualized herein can be developed into loyal and effective support for the Diem Government, or, if developed, that these forces will result in political and military stability within South Vietnam. Unless the Vietnamese themselves show an inclination to make individual and collective sacrifices required to resist communism, which they have not done to date, no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay complete Communist victory in South Vietnam.

Secondly, "the cooperation and collaboration of the French MAAG" is vital to effective execution of the program -- and the JCS doubted that support would be readily offered. Finally, the Chiefs cautioned,



the above program does not provide adequate security for the Associated States against external aggression after the withdrawal of the French forces. With the Viet Minh increasing the size and effectiveness of their forces and with no forces in being committed to mutual defense under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the above long-range program would be insufficient to provide more than limited initial resistance to an organized military assault by the Viet Minh. 34/

f. Collins Agrees with the NSC

Another memorandum of November 17 indicated how quickly the United States had moved to inaugurate the crash program approved at the October 22 NSC meeting. Secretary Dulles outlined for President Eisenhower the recommendations of General J. Lawton Collins, special envoy sent to Vietnam to over-see all U.S. operations, coordinate them with French programs and get things moving. Collins recommended the the "Vietnamese National Army...be reduced by July 1955 to 77,000. It should be placed under Vietnamese command and control by that date.... The cost to the U.S. would be two hundred million dollars annually.... The United States should assume training responsibility...by January 1, 1955, with French cooperation and utilizing French trainers."

Collins insisted that French forces be retained in Vietnam:

It would be disastrous if the French Expeditionary Corps were withdrawn prematurely since otherwise Vietnam would be overrun by an enemy attack before the Manila Pact Powers could act.

To "encourage the French to retain sufficient forces," Collins urged U.S. financial support of at least \$100 million through December 1955. General Ely concurred. 35/

2. Conditions in Vietnam Invite Firmer Action

The situation in Vietnam during the autumn of 1954 invited an action program of some kind -- any kind. Premier Diem barely controlled Saigon; he was opposed by his army's chief of staff, by powerful sect politicians guarding significant special interests with powerful sect armies; he was at least tacitly opposed by many French in Vietnam. The countryside had been devastated by the war; communications, administration and financial operations were stalled; an already prostrate economy was threatened by the deluge of some 860,000 refugees from the north. Over all hung "an atmosphere of frustration and disillusionment" created by the Geneva Accords and imposed partition, "compounded by widespread uncertainty as to French and US intentions." 36/ U.S. policy in August set out to correct the uncertainty: Diem was to be supported by both America and France. But U.S. policy could not eliminate Diem's opposition.

a. The Military Threatens Diem

General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese National Army, was the first coup-plotter to rise and first to fall. September threats of a military revolt were first staved off by the mediation of U.S. Ambassador Donald Heath and General Ely (who doubted Diem's capacity to lead but worked to prevent his violent downfall). Then Diem uncovered a coup plot, arrested some Hinh supporters, removed the general from command and ordered him out of the country. <sup>37/</sup> Hinh refused to leave and continued his machinations against the government. Plans for one coup in October were dropped when Hinh was told revolt would mean automatic termination of U.S. aid. <sup>38/</sup> Another scheduled for October 26 was foiled when Colonel E. G. Lansdale, head of the Saigon Military Mission and chief CIA man on the scene, lured two key subordinates out of the country. Lansdale invited Hinh and staff to visit the Philippines. Hinh unhappily declined but his supporters -- one of whom allegedly was a French agent -- could not resist the chance to see the inner workings of the Magsaysay-led, U.S.-supported operation against Huk insurgents. <sup>39/</sup> Finally, in November, Bao Dai was persuaded by America and France to intervene on Diem's behalf. He did, ordered Hinh to report to Cannes, and on November 19, the general left the country. <sup>40/</sup> General Hinh enjoyed some French support in his anti-Diem activity. Ambassador Heath reported he received "quiet encouragement if not unofficial support" from many French officers and officials in Saigon and "at the working level in Paris." <sup>41/</sup> Hinh was also aided initially by the sects, later by the Binh Xuyen.

b. The Sects Threaten Diem

The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, basically religious groups with important political controls and interests as well as private, French-subsidized armies, worked with Hinh through early September. Then, spurred by the knowledge that precipitate action would jeopardize American aid, the sects agreed to work with Diem. <sup>42/</sup> Last minute threats and "heavy pressure" from French officials against coalition left sect leaders "dizzy" but they recovered sufficiently to accept cabinet positions on September 24. <sup>43/</sup> Shaky to begin with, the coalition never worked: Diem refused to delegate responsibility to his eight new ministers and they soon tired of trying to work through the government.

c. And the Binh Xuyen Oppose Diem

The Binh Xuyen, too, considered joining the coalition but pulled out when Diem refused to name Binh Xuyen leader, "a colorful brigand named Le Van (Bay) Vien" Minister of the Interior. <sup>44/</sup> Bay Vien had forged a motley group of small-time gangsters into a fairly sophisticated organization of 6000 big-time gangsters and river pirates, and



had been helped in this endeavor by Bao Dai and French colonial administrators. The Binh Xuyen controlled prostitution and gambling in Cholon and the Saigon-Cholon police force -- reportedly because Bay Vien paid Bao Dai some 40 million piasters for these privileges. 45/ Still-dissident sect leaders such as Ba Cut, whose 5000 Hoa Hao adherents denounced Geneva and refused cooperation with Diem, and Frenchmen opposed to Diem abetted Binh Xuyen intrigues against the government.

### 3. French Laxity Demands Strong U.S. Programs

More than the Vietnamese power struggles and Diem's inability to consolidate his rule, French activities during the autumn of 1954 galvanized the United States. From acquiescence to U.S. demands in September, American policy makers felt France had moved toward opposition to U.S. demands by November. That this assessment of French actions was either objective or fair is questionable.

#### a. The Washington Conference, September, 1954

After Franco-American discussions in Washington in late September -- the first in a progression of monthly meetings on Vietnam -- the United States seemed to have scored highest. France promised to support Diem, to grant independence to Vietnam quickly. 46/ The transfer of financial, administrative, economic and other functions to the Vietnamese had begun and would be completed by December 1954. That France balked at U.S. demands for an immediate grant of independence outside of the French Union is not surprising: French cultural, economic and political interests in Vietnam were still strong; the Frenchman's belief in the validity of the French Union was deep. No French government dared defy public opinion by seeming to hasten the end of the French Union. 47/ France felt the U.S. had an "almost psychological attachment to 'independence' without giving sufficient thought and attention to the practical problems and risks involved." 48/

Secondly, the U.S. had been able to defer a commitment to finance the French Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam although an indication that aid would be resumed, if not resumption itself, had been the first order of French business at the Washington Conference. 49/ France agreed to maintain the Corps in Vietnam but was told no aid figures would be available until December. 50/

Both France and the U.S. thought their respective economic aims had been won. France objected strongly to the idea of direct American aid to Vietnam on the grounds that it violated the Geneva Accords, would needlessly provoke Communist China, promote graft and corruption in Vietnam, and intensify the political struggle. Plus, "past (French) sacrifices on behalf of Vietnam and their obligation as a member of the French Union" made French supervision of aid essential. 51/ To France, a compromise agreement drafted by Walter Bedell Smith meant the U.S.

accepted these arguments and was willing to give France a hand in disbursing aid to the Associated States. 52/ The U.S. chose not to interpret the agreement this way. The State Department said the U.S. merely indicated willingness to consult on such matters. 53/ On 29 October, Dulles told Mendes-France that the U.S. alone would disperse aid; by late November Mendes-France finally tired of arguing an obviously lost cause and dropped the matter. 54/

b. The U.S. Faults French Support for Diem

Despite apparent agreement at Washington to back Diem, Secretary Dulles met with Mendes-France three weeks later in Paris about the same subject. "For...ready reference" Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover quoted for Dulles part of the 29 September Minute of Understanding in which the

...representatives of France and the United States agree that their respective governments support Ngo Dinh Diem in the establishment and maintenance of a strong, anti-Communist and nationalist government. To this end France and the United States will urge all anti-Communist elements in Vietnam to cooperate fully with the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem in order to counter vigorously the Viet Minh and build a strong free Vietnam....While Ely seems to have attempted honestly to carry out this agreement, the fact that many French elements have never accepted Diem solution must have weakened Ely's efforts and encouraged Hinh camarilla in its recalcitrance.... Unless Diem receives unreserved US and French support, his chances of success appear slight. With such support, his chances are probably better than even, repeat even. 55/

c. Accommodation Between Paris and Hanoi?

Apart from the quiet backing given Diem's opponents by French officers and officials in Saigon and persistent Paris proposals for a change in government (Prince Buu Hoi, whose "political ideologies" were repugnant to Dulles, was a French favorite at this time), the U.S. found in French accommodative gestures toward Hanoi ample proof that French backing for Diem was reserved at best. 56/ Ambassador Dillon felt Mendes-France found in Vietnam a "situation ideally designed to test (the) bases of his fundamental political philosophy of 'peaceful coexistence'" and that his government grew more and more "disposed to explore and consider a policy looking toward an eventual peaceful North-South rapprochement." 57/ French insistence on strict legal interpretation of the Geneva Accords was one example of accommodation thinking. France objected to anything which could possibly delay or destroy elections in 1956; Dillon predicted Paris would accept the results of elections "however academic that exercise may eventually prove to be." 58/



But the most worrisome example to those at the State Department who lined up against any kind of accommodation was the Sainteny Mission to Hanoi.

d. Sainteny or Ely?

Jean Sainteny, credited with reaching short-lived independence accords with Ho Chi Minh in March 1946, was sent back to Hanoi in August 1954 to find ways to protect French business and cultural interests in Tonkin. 59/ Sainteny's past success at rapprochement gave the mission definite political overtones. General Ely wished Paris had sent a "stupid type of consular official" not a man of Sainteny's "active stripes"; he was disturbed enough to fly to Paris to tell Mendes-France he would resign if French policy was to play a "double game" in North and South Vietnam aimed at backing whichever side ultimately won. Mendes-France assured Ely that French policy was to give maximum support to the anti-Communist elements in South Vietnam and do everything possible to assure their victory in 1956. Ely was placated and returned to Saigon. But Sainteny remained in Hanoi and maximum support for Diem did not materialize. 60/

From another source came word that Ely was not "au courant" with French policy. French Union Counsellor Jacques Raphael-Leygues, reportedly a member of the Mendes-France "brain trust" on Indochina, told Ambassador Dillon that Sainteny had convinced Paris that South Vietnam was doomed and the "only possible means of salvaging anything was to play the Viet Minh game and woo the Viet Minh away from Communist ties in the hope of creating a Titoist Vietnam which would cooperate with France and might even adhere to the French Union." Raphael-Leygues said France deferred to U.S. wishes over which government to support in Saigon to get money for the French Expeditionary Corps and to fix responsibility for the eventual loss of South Vietnam on the U.S. 61/

In December 1954, Sainteny won Ho Chi Minh's agreement to permit French enterprises to carry on without discrimination. But if the contract pleased Paris it did not assure French businessmen in Tonkin. Viet Minh legislation would regulate their operations; profits could not be transferred outside the Communist orbit. Most French concerns decided potential benefit was not worth the risk of doing business with the DRV and despite Sainteny's efforts to establish mixed government-private corporations, most withdrew from the North. 62/ Sainteny remained as a "general delegate" to the DRV.

e. The Mansfield Report

A final spur to U.S. action was the Mansfield Report. After a fact-finding trip to South Vietnam, Senator Mansfield concluded

his old acquaintance Diem was the only man for the job in Saigon. He said the issue "is not Diem as an individual but rather the program for which he stands." That program "represents genuine nationalism,... is prepared to deal effectively with corruption and...demonstrates a concern in advancing the welfare of the Vietnamese people." The Senate felt it "improbable" that any other leadership "dedicated to these principles" could be found and recommended the Government "consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union Forces there, except that of a humanitarian nature, preliminary to a complete reappraisal of our present policies in Free Vietnam" if Diem fell. 63/

The Mansfield Report elated Diem (who proceeded to react with even more intransigent self-righteousness to suggestions of change), subdued the French and annoyed Paris. For those Frenchmen who favored conciliation with the Viet Minh, Mansfield's analysis proved the validity of their policy. Obviously, they said, if Diem falls the U.S. will heel Mansfield and withdraw from Vietnam. Equally obviously, they said, Diem will fall. Ergo, France should start "betting on Viet Minh to win war." 64/ To French officials willing to back Diem the Report and Washington's endorsement of it was a violation of the Franco-American agreement to support another government if Diem fell. When Mendes-France reminded Dulles of this and spoke of the need to lay plans for "another structure of government" which both France and the US could support, Dulles was noncommittal. 65/

#### 4. NSC Action Program of October and Eisenhower Letter to Diem

President Eisenhower's letter to Diem of 24 October (written August and shown to the French at that time; held up until the political situation in South Vietnam settled somewhat; finally approved for transmission at the October 22 NSC meeting) was called a direct violation of the principle of cooperative action agreed upon in September by Minister La Chambre. 66/ French Ambassador Bonnet told Secretary Dulles that "it was felt (the letter) had given Diem full rein without requiring of him as a preliminary condition that he should first succeed in forming a strong and stable government, even though this preliminary condition had been a part of the basis of the Washington agreements." Bonnet added that the letter might be a violation of the armistice and the Viet Minh might take advantage of it. 67/ Then, when Ambassador Dillon suggested to the Quai d'Orsay that French support for Diem had not been all that it might have been, La Chambre was inflamed. Not only was this a false allegation, it was a direct slur on General Ely, the government in Paris and the glory of France. M. La Chambre said he was personally convinced Diem was leading South Vietnam to disaster but would still support him:

We prefer to lose in Vietnam with the US rather than to win without them...we would rather support Diem knowing he is going to lose and thus keep Franco-US solidarity than to pick someone who could retain Vietnam for the free world if this meant breaking Franco-US solidarity. 68/



In response, Secretary Dulles formally told Mendes-France that both the Eisenhower letter and the stronger U.S. action were "in furtherance of the understandings reached at Washington." The U.S. had not "the slightest idea of questioning the good faith of the French government" but "many French officials have not concealed their belief that Diem has failed...and...should be replaced." This attitude produced an "impasse in Saigon" necessitating firmer action. 69/ La Chambre received this with "little comment" other than to suggest appointment of Nguyen Van Tam (General Hinh's father, Premier during 1952-1953 and a strong-even oppressive-administrator) to the Interior Ministry. La Chambre called this a "way out of the mess...(for) here is a man who knows how to fight Communists." 70/ As in the past, the U.S. rejected the proposal.

#### 5. More Action: The Collins Mission

The initial U.S. action program rested on three assumptions: that Diem could be persuaded to accept U.S. proposals, that Hinh would obey the government, that the French at all levels would cooperate. None proved immediately valid. So the U.S. adopted yet another tactic. General J. Lawton Collins, U.S. Representative to the NATO Military Committee, was dispatched to Vietnam on November 8 with the personal rank of Ambassador (Heath returned to the State Department). As President Eisenhower described it, Collins' mission was:

to coordinate and direct a program in support of (Diem's) government to enable it to: (a) promote internal security and political and economic stability; (b) establish and maintain control throughout the territory; and (c) effectively counteract Viet Minh infiltration and paramilitary activities south of the demarkation line. 71/

After initial resistance to the Collins mission (seen as a precursor to complete U.S. take-over of Indochina), General Ely established a close working relationship with Collins. A seven-point program for political, military and economic action was quickly designed. On December 13, Ely and Collins signed a Minute of Understanding agreeing that France would grant full autonomy to the VNA by July 1, 1955 and that the U.S. would assume training duties in January. They agreed the French Expeditionary Corps must remain in Vietnam and the level of financial assistance suggested by Collins (\$100 million through December 1955 after which assistance was not contemplated) was adopted by the Foreign Operations Administration and subsequently announced to Paris. Aid was contingent upon consultation with Congress and "subject to Ely and Collins and the two governments mutually agreeing on what is to be done in Indochina." 72/

#### 6. France Objects to Collins-Ely Agreements

Paris was unhappy about the aid figure -- a third of what France requested. Consequently, withdrawal of French forces was speeded: of the 150,000 troops scheduled to remain in Vietnam through 1955, all but 35,000 were phased out. Monetary reasons were said to be

paramount but political and psychological pressures for the pull-out were probably more important. There was strong sentiment in France for sending the FEC to North Africa where it could serve the interests of France and the French Union. In Vietnam, French soldiers served the free world but were hated by the Vietnamese and ignored by the very powers they aided, powers which did not care enough to properly defray French expenses. 73/

Paris was more upset by the Minute of Understanding. During November discussion with Dulles, Mendes-France had said he doubted full autonomy could be assumed by the Vietnamese by July 1955 and believed a readjustment of MAAG personnel for the new training mission might violate the Geneva Accords. These arguments were reiterated at December Trilateral meetings. But Mendes-France's real trouble was agreeing to phase out French instructors. Neither the French people nor French soldiers would understand why France was denied influence while required to support such a heavy burden in Vietnam. Mendes-France and General Ely insisted that if French instructors were eliminated the U.S. automatically would have assumed primary responsibility for free world policy toward Indochina. 74/ (Dulles and General Collins rejected that line of reasoning but convinced neither the French nor others that it was fallacious.)

Collins compromised in the Minute of Understanding by agreeing to softer language (both French and American instructors would be removed as Vietnamese efficiency increased), hoping to assuage Paris. He failed. When the Minute was forwarded for final approval Mendes-France stalled. First he had to study it closely to ensure no conflict with Geneva was involved. Then on January 7, the French submitted a redraft of the Minute which omitted reference to General O'Daniel's authority over French personnel. 75/

Collins was already annoyed by hedging in December, tantamount to a slap in the face of Ely to whom full authority to negotiate the agreement had been delegated. 76/ He refused to "agree to (the redraft) unless specifically instructed by higher authority" because lines of authority were not spelled out. 77/ Yet Ely thought Paris had approved the original agreement. He urged Collins to continue negotiations with the Vietnamese on the basis of the first Minute, advice Collins followed despite the Paris-Washington snafu. On January 19 and 20 a formal exchange of letters finalized the agreement for U.S. assumption of training duties and financial support (\$214.5 million) for the Vietnamese forces. The forces would be scaled down to 100,000 by December 1955. Both cost and force levels were raised from Collins' November recommendations in deference to Vietnamese arguments. 78/ The U.S. and France remained deadlocked until February 11, 1955, when the terms -- but not the form -- of the original agreement were finally accepted. The next day, General O'Daniel assumed responsibility for training Vietnamese forces and the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) went into operation. 79/



#### D. Franco-American Impasse Over Diem

Resolution of military problems within the U.S. Government and between the U.S. and France was a fairly major accomplishment. Political differences were not similarly resolved. To support or not to support Ngo Dinh Diem was the issue over which France and America split.

##### 1. Paris: Diem Is Ill-Suited for Rule

As noted above, France acquiesced in the retention of Diem as Prime Minister in deference to U.S. insistence and French concern for U.S. financial assistance for the FEC during the September Washington conference. In mid-November, Mendes-France reaffirmed the 29 September agreement but said an alternative form of government had to be considered unless Diem implemented an energetic program within the next two months. By December, when Mendes-France, Dulles and Eden met in Paris, the French Premier made it clear he thought the time had come for a change. Two ways to accomplish change were suggested. Bao Dai could name a Viceroy and give him full authority to use the powers of Chief of State to unify the warring political factions. Tran Van Huu, Nguyen Van Tam or Dr. Phan Huy Quat were possible candidates for this job. 80/ Or, Bao Dai himself could return to Saigon and form a government with Huu as Premier, Tam as Interior Minister, Quat in Defense. 81/

France wanted Diem out of power for several reasons. U.S. policymakers did not seem to fully appreciate how galling Diem's Franco-phobia must have been, nor did the U.S. seem to understand -- or allow for -- the divisive effect Diem's militant anti-communist stance had within the French Government. Little consideration was given to charges that the U.S. was undermining France by portraying itself as the only friend of Vietnamese nationalism. But the U.S. could appreciate the validity of French arguments that Diem had not been and perhaps would not be able to unify and stabilize South Vietnam.

##### 2. Collins: Diem Cannot Lead South Vietnam

General Collins had been skeptical about Diem from the outset; by December he was convinced an alternative to his government should be urgently considered. Diem's refusal to name Dr. Quat as Defense Minister triggered Collins' recommendation. Both Collins and Colonel Lansdale had urged Diem to accept Quat, agreeing Quat alone was strong enough to unify the Vietnamese armed forces behind the Saigon government. On December 13, Collins suggested five reasons for Diem's adverse decision:

- (1) unwillingness to delegate control of Vietnam armed forces to any strong man;
- (2) fear of Quat as potential successor;
- (3) opposition of sects (who also feared a strong man in the defense post);
- (4) influence of brothers Luyen and Nhu (anxious to neutralize the power of any potential successor);
- (5) desire to retain Minh (acting defense minister; loyal to Diem) in government. 82/

According to Collins,

Whatever the reasons, the failure to utilize Quat epitomizes lack of unity among Vietnamese and lack of decisive leadership on part of Diem....Acceptance of status quo with Minh elevated to Defense Ministry and sects reinforced in veto power over government is simply postponing evil day of reckoning as to when, if ever, Diem will assert type of leadership that can unify this country and give it chance of competing with hard, effective, unified control of Ho Chi Minh. 83/

Three days later, General Collins communicated his "final judgment" on the situation. He made four recommendations:

- A. Continue to support Diem along present lines for short while longer but without committing US to specific aid programs;
- B. Consider urgently, as possible alternative, the early return of Bao Dai;
- C. If after short period of further test Diem Government fails to achieve substantial progressive action and if return of Bao Dai is acceptable to US Government, to support his prompt return;
- D. If return of Bao Dai is not acceptable to US Government, assuming Diem Government continues to demonstrate inability to unite free Vietnam behind an aggressive program, I recommend re-evaluation of our plans for assisting Southeast Asia with special attention (to an) earlier proposal. 84/

The earlier proposal, made by General Collins on December 13, was that the U.S. gradually withdraw from Vietnam. Collins said this was the "least desirable (but) in all honesty and in view of what I have observed here to date this may be the only sound solution." 85/

### 3. State Department: Diem Is the Only Available Leader

The State Department went along with Collins' suggestion to avoid specific assistance commitments at the present time but could not see salvation in Bao Dai. A memorandum from Ambassador Heath, then working in the Far East Bureau is indicative of State Department thinking. Heath first called attention to "massive opposition" faced by Diem and French unwillingness to firmly support him -- implying that all Diem's problems were not Diem's fault. He then spoke of General Collins' "attempt to achieve a rapid solution," said Collins' "recommendations are now based on the circumstances of a satisfactory settlement prior to January 1" -- thereby suggesting that one not looking for a rapid solution might not arrive at similar conclusions.



The memorandum closed with Heath's interpretation of Secretary Dulles' policy and his own thoughts as to what ought to be done:

In our view, General Collins' recommendations ignore the basic factor that we would assist a Communist takeover by a withholding of our aid, even if it must necessarily be given to a government which is less than perfect. The Secretary has analyzed the situation as one in which we are conducting a time buying operation. If we withhold our support to Vietnam, it will be taken over sooner than if we extend smaller aid, at a figure of about a third of last year. In the meantime, we will proceed to do what we can to strengthen Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. This is my understanding of the Secretary's policy.

I recommend we inform the Secretary and General Collins that we recognize the dangers posed by the above policy, but that in the lack of more useful alternatives that we will continue to support Diem, because there is no one to take his place who would serve US objectives any better. This includes the Bao Dai solution which is opposed by the facts of Bao Dai's lack of support in Vietnam and his past demonstrations of inability to govern. The fear that a fiscal commitment of over \$300 million plus our national prestige would be lost in a gamble on the retention of Free Vietnam is a legitimate one, but the withholding of our support at this juncture would almost inevitably have a far worse effect." 86/

The substance of the memorandum was cabled to Secretary Dulles, then in Paris for the Tripartite French, U.S. and British discussions. 87/

#### 4. December Tripartite Talks

##### a. France Proposes Alternative to Diem, Dulles Seems to Acquiesce

On 19 December, Mendes-France opened the Indochina talks by calling Diem's approach "wholly negative," said "not a single reform suggested (by Franco-American working groups advising the government on all matters) had been accepted by Diem," that the "French Government now considered...a strong approach would have to be made to Diem." Reaffirming his past agreement with Dulles' "thesis that we must do our maximum to permit Diem Government to succeed" Mendes-France added:

now...he was not longer sure that even maximum would help. He said we must now have alternate formula in mind. Without varying from our stated purpose of supporting Diem Government as long as it exists we must now prepare in our minds for alternative. 88/

Dulles agreed the

task in South Vietnam was difficult (but) regarded basic factors as favorable. People were opposed to communism and had great natural resources...they received greater aid from abroad than North...situation was much improved now that there was full cooperation between French and American authorities. The problem must not be approached in spirit of defeatism. Only serious problem we have not yet solved is that of indigenous leadership. We cannot expect it to be solved ideally because there is no tradition among indigenous people for self-government. We must get along with something less good than best....(The US was) not repeat not committed to Diem in any irrevocable sense. We have accepted him because we knew of no one better. Developments have confirmed our fears as to his limitations but no substitute for him has yet been proposed. Those suggested in past varied from month to month. Now it is claimed that only Bao Dai can save situation. If that is case, then we must indeed be desperate....We should continue to back Diem but exert more pressure on him to make changes we consider necessary. 89/

Mendes-France suggested the U.S. and France approach Bao Dai and mentioned the French Viceroy plan to replace Diem. Dulles countered by saying the U.S. and French might use Bao Dai but "we must go to him prepared with our own ideas and not...simply accept his." Dulles did not expect any Viceroy to be able "to decide on alternate to Diem and to set up machinery to implement our ideas...our job (is) to create this machinery." He added,

We must exhaust all our pressures on Diem to get things done before considering alternate solutions....He asked Mendes not to think we had obstinately closed our minds to possible alternate solution. We had not repeat not, but our investigation of alternate must be done on careful basis and we must for present support Diem. 90/

Mendes-France agreed. He summarized his position as follows:

First, to support Diem; second, to study alternatives. Collins and Ely should be instructed to explore further possibilities including Bao Dai with great discretion... third point was that Ely and Collins should be requested to investigate matter of timing. How much further delay can be tolerated?...We must set deadline.... 91/



Then Dulles agreed -- but added a fourth point:

If the US should decide that there is no repeat no good alternative to Diem we will have to consider how much more investment we will be prepared to make in Indochina. Our policy would have to be reappraised. Congressional committees...would have to be consulted. Mansfield believes in Diem....Even slight chance of success in Vietnam was worth considerable investment. US had also to think of what happened in adjacent countries -- in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Malaya. US situation was different from that of French. French had an investment in lives and property in Vietnam while ours involved effect that fate of Vietnam would have on rest of Southeast Asia. 92/

b. But Dulles Reports, No Other Suitable Leader Can Be Seen

After the Tripartite meetings, Dulles reported his assessment of their outcome to Saigon. He said he had agreed with Mendes-France on four points concerning Diem but had not agreed to a deadline for Diem's replacement. Rather, "Collins and Ely would report late January on overall situation."

Dulles called the "investment in Vietnam justified even if only to buy time to build up strength elsewhere in area" and concluded:

We are going to have to maintain flexible policy and proceed carefully by stages in Vietnam....Under present circumstances and unless situation (in Vietnam) clearly appears hopeless and rapidly disintegrating, we have no choice but continue our aid Vietnam and support of Diem. There no other suitable leader known to us. 93/

France believed Dulles had in fact committed the United States to consider a change with which Bao Dai would be associated by mid-January. Washington denied it and Paris protests were unable to budge the State Department. The U.S. and France did agree that the Tripartite talks had given Collins and Ely a mandate to study alternatives, however. 94/

c. The U.S. Looks at Alternatives

Having told Paris the U.S. was not committed to either a deadline or an alternative involving Bao Dai, the U.S. proceeded to study alternatives. Secretary of Defense Wilson asked the Joint Staff to assess the impact on military commitments to Southeast Asia of the loss of South Vietnam, of continued but reduced assistance to that nation and of a range of actions in between. 95/ The JCS responded by calling Wilson's alternate options incomplete, that consideration of increased aid, and institution of a unilateral program of direct guidance to the GVN through an "advisory system" should be among U.S. considerations. If these programs were insufficient to insure the retention of South

Vietnam to the free world the U.S. might deploy "self-sustaining forces to South Vietnam either unilaterally or as part of a Manila Pact force" or the U.S. could withdraw all U.S. support from South Vietnam and concentrate on "saving the rest of Southeast Asia."

No specific course of action was recommended but the JCS predicted the loss of Cambodia and Laos would follow a communist take-over of South Vietnam; they felt a greatly expanded aid program would be necessary to retain a friendly government in Thailand. In any event, the chance that U.S. armed forces would be required to support American policy in Southeast Asia would be greatly increased if South Vietnam fell. The Chiefs concluded by saying "a firm decision at the national level as to the implementation of US policy in Southeast Asia is mandatory, recommended...against a 'static' defense for this area and ...recommended adoption of a concept of offensive actions against the military power of the aggressor." 96/

#### 5. January 1955: U.S. Backing for Diem is Reaffirmed

General Collins' recommendations to the National Security Council on January 20, 1955 underscored the crucial position South Vietnam held within the context of American policy toward Southeast Asia. Like Dulles and the Joint Chiefs before him, Collins said:

In view of the importance of Vietnam to all of Southeast Asia, I am convinced that the United States should expend the funds, material and efforts required to strengthen the country and help it retain its independence. I cannot guarantee that Vietnam will remain free even with our aid. But I know that without our aid Vietnam will surely be lost to Communism. If the chances of success are difficult to calculate, the results of a withdrawal of American aid are only too certain not only in Vietnam but throughout Southeast Asia. Such a withdrawal would hasten the pace of Communist advances in the Far East as a whole and could result in the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism. In my opinion the chance of success is not only worth the gamble; we cannot afford to let free Vietnam go by default. 97/

Collins was more sanguine about Diem than he had been a month before. Diem had shown some progress: General Minh was named Minister of Defense and seemed to be doing an adequate job; Diem had launched an anti-corruption drive (and in closing the Grande Monde Casino, Diem threw down the gauntlet before the Binh Xuyen) and had made some advances in land reform. Collins recommended continued U.S. support for him:

On balance I believe that Diem's integrity, strong nationalism, tenacity and spiritual qualities render him the best available Premier to lead Vietnam...against communism....Considering all factors, although the situation



in Vietnam is not bright, I believe that if Diem has firm US support and guidance and active French cooperation, or at least acquiescence, his government has a reasonable prospect of success. 98/

As a result of Collins' recommendations the NSC endorsed a strong policy in Vietnam: the US would continue to support the Diem government and continue to press France to carry out its commitments under the Smith-LaChambre agreement. The NSC approved in principle the programs of military and economic aid to implement Collins' recommendations (about \$500 million) and determined to seek reaffirmation of the Manila powers' determination to react under the SEATO treaty if hostilities were resumed. 99/ Dulles decided to "take the plunge" and begin direct aid to Vietnam on January 1, 1955. The aid program was to be flexible and fluid, adjusted according to circumstances and subject to discontinuance at any time, as at present." 100/

#### E. Crisis of the Spring, 1955

With strong United States backing, Diem went into the sect crisis of the spring, 1955. Different from the military coup crisis of Autumn 1954 and the Quat cabinet crisis of December, the sect crisis was resolved by Diem's taking firm action and was not followed by another. It was followed by the end of any real French presence in Vietnam.

##### 1. The Problem of the Sect Armies

The sects had been quiescent but not quiet since Cao Dai and Hoa Hao ministers had joined the cabinet in September 1954. The end of French subsidies for sect armies in February shook them out of complacency. Diem agreed to pay a part of what the armies had received from the French to ease the transition of some 40,000 soldiers to civilian life. But transition it was to be: he would not tolerate armed bands separate from VNA command and separate from Saigon's political guidance. Sect leaders had different objectives, however. They wanted to preserve their military forces by integrating, intact, as many units as possible into the National Army. (With a VNA force level of 100,000, few could be accommodated; in January only 6,000 sect troops had been absorbed.) Secondly, the sects wanted substantial government assistance for soldiers forced to leave the military. Most important, they wanted recognition of their areas of influence and Diem's assurance that he would not encroach on their territories. Diem would countenance no part of this third request. 101/

Since December, a Franco-American group headed by Col. Lansdale and directed to "come up with a peaceful solution" to the problem had worked furiously, found a solution and urged its prompt adoption. Generals Collins and Ely decided to give the matter further study. Lansdale's reaction:

We warned them that time was extremely short, that the sects were about to take action by arms and that a peaceful solution would have to be introduced immediately or the opportunity would be lost. The opportunity was lost. 102/

## 2. The United Front Challenges Diem

Lost because Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sect leaders joined with Bay Vien in February, put down hostilities among themselves and joined in a United Front of Nationalist Forces. In March, the United Front demanded Diem form a government of large national union. The eight sect cabinet members resigned (although Cao Dai Generals The' and Phuong soon changed their minds). A United Front delegate tried to convince Bao Dai to withdraw Diem's powers as premier but the timely arrival of a personal letter from President Eisenhower outlining US objectives and progress in Vietnam proved more persuasive. The letter either reassured Bao Dai that the US had not written him out of the political picture or made him think twice about joining with the sects and thereby incurring US wrath. Whatever the reason, he refused to intervene on behalf of the Front. 103/ Diem called the Front Program an ultimatum and would not budge.

France wanted Bao Dai to mediate between Diem and the United Front. The US wanted to issue a joint declaration telling the sects both America and France opposed violence and warning them that the French Expeditionary Corps would block any movement of Hoa Hao troops into Saigon to reinforce the Binh Xuyen. Ely and Paris refused the warning clause: French troops would act only in protection of the lives and property of French and foreign nationals. 104/

## 3. Diem Challenges the Binh Xuyen

During this time, Lansdale was meeting almost nightly with Diem. He reports Diem

was desperately trying to get French and US help to remove the Surete from the control of the Binh Xuyen. French and US reactions to the problem were in the form of advice to proceed slowly, to act with caution. Events would not permit this. 105/

Before dawn on the 28th of March, a paratrooper company loyal to Diem attacked and overcame the Binh Xuyen-controlled central police headquarters. The next day, Diem told Defense Minister Minh he planned to oust Binh Xuyen Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang that afternoon -- March 29 -- and replace him with someone loyal to his regime. Minh insisted Diem at least consult the cabinet before taking action. Diem refused and Minh resigned. Representatives of General Ely were able to persuade Diem to defer any move against the Surete, however. 106/



On the night of March 29-30 the Binh Xuyen struck back. Mortar shells fell on the palace grounds and Binh Xuyen troops tried to regain the prefecture. They were repulsed by National Army troops. The VNA then moved to attack the Sureté itself in retaliation but French officers apparently cut off their gas and ammunition supplies temporarily to keep the National Army on the defensive. Fighting ended by 3:30 in the morning of March 30. 107/

General Ely opposed a VNA offensive against the Sureté headquarters, not because it might fail but because it was irrelevant. Relevant was Diem's inability to defeat the sects rapidly and decisively throughout the country. If force were used to prove a minor point, a long, bloody and major civil war would surely ensue. Ely was outraged at Diem's attitude. He felt the premier verged on megalomania and was ready to "put the city to sword and flame to establish his authority." 108/ Collins sympathized with Ely, but also felt if Diem did not prove he could control Saigon he would be forced to accede to sect demands. 109/

#### 4. Truce - But No Calm

On March 31, a 48-hour cease-fire was won by General Jean Gambiez, trusted by both the National Army and the Binh Xuyen. The truce was extended into April but failed to cool tempers or ease tensions. (Cao Dai forces which had broken with the United Front were integrated into the National Army on March 31, however -- one happy note for Diem.)

##### a. Lansdale's version

Lansdale, whose account of this and later developments is not at all flattering to the French, says Ely decided to impose a cease-fire and won Collins' concurrence. French officers then moved in and stopped the fighting. Lansdale "saw Ambassador Collins...explaining that only the Binh Xuyen would gain by the cease-fire." But it continued:

Ambassador Collins was sincerely convinced that the Binh Xuyen could be induced by French negotiations to withdraw from the Sureté and police control of the metropolis.... 110/

Lansdale reports the French had long been working against Diem through the Vietnamese National Army (they used its G-6 as an arm of French intelligence) and that French soldiers under his command in the National Security Division of TRIM tried to sabotage the Diem regime and US programs designed to strengthen it.

The French had daily fed us the latest French propaganda line (Diem was weak, Diem was bloodthirsty, the VNA had low morale ...was unable to fight, Americans didn't understand the Vietnamese, all whites must encourage only selected Vietnamese loyal to the French because the remainder would turn against

all whites in another "night of the long knives" similar to that of 1946.)

Now the French had been insistent that the National Army was a hollow shell, that its officers would refuse to fight...that morale was so bad the troops would desert rather than follow "bloody Diem." 111/

Lansdale implies Collins fell for this "propaganda" but he, Lansdale, did not.

On the cease-fire, Lansdale reports:

The French told Diem that if he tried to take over Suret<sup>é</sup> headquarters which was now included in the French zone, French troops would open fire on the Vietnamese Army. The US advised Diem to be patient, that the French were really being helpful by negotiating with the Binh Xuyen. The cease-fire limit was extended...Sizeable sums were being offered (by French) to Army officers and to sect leaders who were remaining loyal to Diem and to entice them into being at least neutral. Those who refused were subjected to character assassination attacks... 112/

b. Ely and Collins' Decision: Diem Must Go

On April 7, Collins and Ely discussed Diem. Ely said Diem could be maintained only by overcoming enormous difficulties. After a full day of "soul-searching," Ely had been forced to conclude Diem had to go to preserve Vietnam for the free world. He would accept anyone but Diem as premier. 113/ Collins had been nearing a similar conclusion. On March 31 he told the State Department it was necessary to consider alternatives to Diem. 114/ A week later Collins cabled Dulles to insist Diem be removed. He recommended Tran Van Do (Diem's foreign minister who also resigned from the cabinet in March) or Dr. Quat as replacements. 115/

c. Dulles' Indecision

Dulles replied as he had in December: he could not see how Diem's replacement would solve the sect problem for any successor worthy of US assistance would still have to contend with them. A change in premiers would damage US prestige throughout the Far East: the US would be charged with paying lip service to the cause of Asian nationalism, then abandoning a nationalist leader when pressured by "colonial interests." Plus pro-Diem Congressional sentiment was a problem. The Mutual Security bill was under debate and Mansfield had made it clear that Congress would be reluctant to appropriate funds to a Vietnam without Diem. Despite these difficulties, Dulles eventually agreed to consider a change if Collins would personally come to Washington for consultation. 116/



d. Paris: Diem's Time Is Up

At the same time Paris was fast losing patience. The time has come to form a government responsive to dominant political forces in Vietnam, to abandon the unrealistic U.S. policy of maintaining and strengthening Diem, said France. Formation of a Conseil Superieur was proposed, representative of Diem and his supporters, the sects, intellectuals, politicians and the army. The Conseil would decide policy and a cabinet of non-political technicians headed by Diem would implement it. 117/ But the U.S. rejected this plan saying Diem should be allowed to strike back at the Binh Xuyen with force and France and America should support him -- morally and logistically. 118/

Then Washington asked the Quai d'Orsay to answer a set of questions designed to elicit specific French plans for the change in Vietnamese government. Paris' rejoinder: the questions should be answered jointly or the united Franco-American effort in Vietnam would be over and France would have to say publicly that the U.S. had assumed sole responsibility for developments in Vietnam. 119/ But in mid-April, France filled-in part of the questionnaire -- leaving blank a successor to Diem (only joint consultation could decide this). Paris proposed Collins and Ely draw up a slate of acceptable candidates for major positions. The U.S. and French governments would agree on a final list, ask Bao Dai to summon representatives of various factions to Cannes and on the basis of French-U.S. recommendations, negotiate a solution to the sect-Binh Xuyen-Diem impasse. Sect support would be assured by their membership in a high council and a program of honors, indemnification and integration of sect troops into the National Army. 120/

e. Bao Dai's Plan

On April 21, Bao Dai announced his own plan for resolving the crisis, remarkably similar to that submitted by Paris. Bao Dai wanted to summon various representatives to Cannes, name Dr. Quat as premier, ask him to form a cabinet of technicians and a high council of notables. On April 26, Bao Dai said he would implement the scheme unilaterally unless the U.S. made some response by the following day. 121/

Meanwhile, Collins had left Saigon for consultations with Dulles. Lansdale reports a meeting held just before his departure:

He (Collins) told Lansdale not to be worried by newspaper rumors that the US would stop supporting Diem. Lansdale asked then if his orders were to continue supporting Diem; Collins said yes. Members of the country team privately felt that Diem should be supported by us, that the National Army was ready to support him and had the capability of defeating the Binh Xuyen. 122/

f. Dulles' decision: U.S. Will Consider a Change in Regime

General Collins and Secretary Dulles met on April 27. Dulles agreed to consider shifting support to either Quat or Do and a message to this effect was sent to Saigon. 123/ But Dulles determined not to discuss this with France until a full and frank statement of her intentions had been received. That statement was to include an unequivocal assurance to back whole-heartedly any new political arrangements in Saigon and to resolve "certain ambiguities" in French policy toward North Vietnam. Until this declaration appeared the US would reveal no change of heart over Diem. 124/

5. Diem Acts Against the Binh Xuyen

Then the truce exploded. On 28 April, Diem told Lansdale:

The Army and people laid the blame (for the crisis between the government and the Binh Xuyen) on the French because they could see French armored vehicles and troops in the streets evidently ready for action against the Vietnamese. We (Lansdale and an assistant) told him that it looked as the Vietnamese still needed a leader, that Diem was still President, that the US was still supporting him.

That afternoon, Diem's private secretary called Lansdale. He said the palace was

under heavy mortar fire, that the President was on another line talking to General Ely, that Ely stated that he couldn't hear any explosions and the President was holding the mouthpiece out towards the explosions so Ely could hear them. Hai (the secretary) started to ask what should be done, interrupted himself to say that the President had just ordered the National Army to start returning the fire and had so informed Ely. He hung up. 125/

Against the advice of French, US and most cabinet advisors, Diem had issued a decree charging Police Commissioner Lai Van Sang with "very grave official misconduct" and named Col. Nguyen Ngoc Le to replace him. Sang refused to resign, saying only Bao Dai had authority to remove him. Binh Xuyen troops in Cholon apparently opened fire on National Army units and Binh Xuyen shells fell again on the palace. But within nine hours after Diem's order to take the offensive, the National Army had driven the Binh Xuyen back into Cholon. Fires raged (set by the Binh Xuyen, according to Lansdale); hundreds were killed or wounded. 126/



## 6. Washington Acts: U.S. Will (Again) Support Diem

Washington responded with alacrity to Diem's success, superficial though it was. Saigon was told to forget Dulles' earlier message about US willingness to see a change in government. Policy had not changed after all: the US supported Diem. The Saigon Embassy burned the first message. 127/

## 7. Diem and Others Defy Bao Dai

Buoyed by his showing against Bay Vien, Diem ignored the summons from Bao Dai which appeared on April 28. The Emperor ordered Diem and General Ty to Cannes, placed Binh Xuyen sympathizer General Vy in charge of the army and dispatched General Hinh to Saigon with personal instructions from Bao Dai. 128/ Diem refused to leave Saigon, refused to allow General Vy to assume command, refused to allow General Hinh into the country. 129/

On April 30 a new development surfaced. The National Revolutionary Congress of the Vietnamese people was announced. Backed by Cao Dai Generals Phuong and Thé, Hoa Hao General Ngo, other attentiste politicians, it claimed to represent almost all political parties in South Vietnam. The Congress declaration repudiated Bao Dai, dissolved the present government and called on Diem to form a new government and elect a national assembly to draft a constitution. 130/

Diem was receptive to the program of the Revolutionary Congress, particularly since his brother Nhu had a hand in drafting it. He was probably not as receptive to some of the activist members of the Congress, however, most of whom joined in a Revolutionary Committee. Generals Trinh Minh Thé and Phuong confided to Lansdale:

The Revolutionary Committee had grown out of the Revolutionary Congress Front organization which Diem's brother Nhu had tried to organize some days earlier; they had followed (SMI's) advice and had joined with Nhu in the Front but were dissatisfied with some of the weak organizations they felt Nhu was depending on, so had organized something more dynamic to meet the threat of Vy and Bao Dai and called themselves the Revolutionary Committee. They wanted Bao Dai dethroned and wanted the French to stop interfering in Vietnamese affairs. 131/

Support, backhanded though it may have been, helped Diem politically in Vietnam and with the United States. Militarily he was never really threatened by Bao Dai or Generals Vy or Hinh (who was never able to deliver Bao Dai's special orders). The National Army was stronger than French and Americans thought and it refused to obey General Vy. The following episode, related to Lansdale by General Ty and Colonel Tran Van Don after their temporary arrest by Vy, illustrates this. General Vy bragged about being able to get anything he wanted from the French. Ty and Don asked him to prove

it." (They)...asked him to call up the French and request the armored vehicles which the French had been holding at Bien Hoa so long without delivering to the Vietnamese Army. The French rushed these vehicles to Hinh's house (Vy's headquarters), evidently having been holding them just outside town for this emergency, where Army men took them over and drove them into the fight against the Binh Xuyen. Don said the French still hadn't caught on, still thought that Vy would use this armor to bring the Army into line to stop fighting the Binh Xuyen and be loyal to Bao Dai. Don added that the Army felt the same as the Revolutionary Committee: Bao Dai was finished." 132/ General Vy retreated to Dalat (and Bao Dai's Imperial Guards), then left the country.

During these days, General Ely had grown more convinced that Diem was not only irresponsible, he was quite mad. Ely feared fighting would spread to the European sector but was unable to win American or British support for an attempt to reimpose the cease-fire. American Charge d'Affairs Kidder felt Ely himself was approaching hysteria and that his emotional involvement compromised his usefulness to either France or the United States. 133/ Ely's premonitions of violence between Vietnamese and French forces proved unfounded. But violence did accompany Diem's final offensive against the Binh Xuyen which opened on May 2 when the VNA crossed the Chinese Arroyo and attacked Bay Vien's forces in Cholon. By the following day, most of the Binh Xuyen had been driven out into the Rung Sat swamps.

When Collins returned to Saigon he urged Diem to hold the Revolutionary Committee in check (Collins, most of the French and French intelligence thought Vietminh had infiltrated the front organization; they feared Diem would become its prisoner if he backed it too strongly). Collins wanted Diem to reconstitute the government and get on with reforms, leaving the problem of Bao Dai to an elected national assembly. 135/ Diem followed this advice. He invited some 700 elected counselors from 39 provinces to consider Bao Dai's legality. An Estates General composed of 50 counselors drew up a program demanding Bao Dai transfer all civilian and military powers to Diem who would exercise them until the assembly met -- within six months -- to draw up a constitution. 136/

## 8. May Trilateral Meetings

### a. Dulles Backs Diem

At this same time, France, the United States and Britain met once again in Paris. The Tripartite session had been called to discuss problems of European Defense but Vietnam was the real subject. The positions of both Secretary Dulles and French Prime Minister Edgar Faure (who succeeded Mendes-France in February 1955) toward Diem had hardened. Dulles insisted he be upheld:

Diem is only means US sees to save South Vietnam and counter-act (the) revolutionary movement underway in Vietnam. US sees



no one else who can. Whatever US view has been in past, today US must support Diem whole-heartedly. US must not permit Diem to become another Karensky.

...Bao Dai...had irretrievably lost capacity to be anything but titular head of government....Cao Dai and Hoa Hao could be used but not Binh Xuyen....With support (of France and US) Diem could sit on top of revolution. Diem is only force of moderation. FEC is certain stabilizing influence. US was giving funds to support Vietnamese army and could not see anyone else to give funds to but Diem for that purpose.

..In US view present revolution is not yet dominated or influenced by Communists to any appreciable degree....Support of Diem did not indicate US non-recognition of his weaknesses. US...had been and remained ready to support any other man who might be presented by orderly process of law. (Dulles) remarked that just before outbreak of fighting US was prepared to consider alternatives but he was not sure now that it would have been practical....If there is a better man US is ready to consider him but ...no one has been suggested. Although Collins had reached agreement with Ely in early April to change Diem he now believes we must support him. 137/

b. The French Position

French Minister La Forest had opened the meeting by pointing to consultations (scheduled for July) between North and South Vietnam about elections. He said France felt South Vietnam could win the contest if a "nationalist, stable and broadly based government" were in control and that France wanted South Vietnam to win.

There is no ambiguity in French policy between North and South Vietnam. Presence of France in North could not be erased by stroke of pen. It is French duty to protect her cultural and economic presence there. Sainteny mission is designed for only that purpose. France had given up thought of mixed companies as result (US) objections and had now surrendered coal mines...

LaForest presented the French analysis of events over the past four months. While the US could not argue his facts, the US could not accept LaForest's interpretation of them. Differences between the two nations were more fundamental than at any time in the past.

...France had loyally supported government of Diem from beginning. Any allegation to contrary is untrue...France reached agreement with US last December to persuade "or compel" Diem to

enlarge government. It was agreed to give him until January at which time, if he had failed, we would look into matter of alternate discreetly. This was not done. Last March present government broke into open conflict with sects. United Front of sects was formed against Diem. Both December agreement and common sense told us at that time that something (had) to be done to avoid civil war....For this reason, joint Ely-Collins approach was tried. It was hoped they would arrive at joint plan for solution. Washington appeared first to welcome this concept then changed its mind. Collins left Saigon when civil war was about to break out. Untenable truces were declared. When they were about to expire Bao Dai submitted his own plan...in order to try to reconcile US and French failure to act. US failed to reply to Bao Dai. In absence of Collins from Saigon, Bao Dai acted.

LaForest continued...that new Revolutionary Committee appeared to have control. Committee is strongly under Viet Minh influence.... There is violent campaign against French and French Expeditionary Control. Viet Minh agents make good use of it and certain Americans do not seem sufficiently aware of this. French Government does not wish to have its army act as platform for Vietminh propaganda. Army will not be maintained at any cost... 138/

c. Faure: We Will Withdraw to Save the US-France Alliance

Then M. Faure took the floor, stating France was not in agreement with the United States and that it was time to speak frankly. He said Diem is "not only incapable but mad," he took advantage of Collins' absence to effect a "coup de force which won primary victory but which has not contributed to any lasting solution" and "France can no longer take risks with him." Diem will "bring on a Viet Minh victory, focus the hostility of everyone on French" and force a break between France and the US.

Faure concluded with this significant statement.

Diem is a bad choice, impossible solution, with no chance to succeed and no chance to improve the situation. Without him some solution might be possible, but with him there is none. However, I cannot guarantee any other solution would work nor is it possible to clarify the situation. There seems to be fundamental disagreement between us. I could have claimed that since French position is predominant in Vietnam, you should accommodate your views more to ours, but I have rejected this. What should be done under the circumstances? What would you say if we were to retire entirely from Indochina and call back the FEC as soon as possible. I fully realize this would be a grave solution, as it would leave French civilians and French interests in a difficult



position....If you think this might be a possible solution, I think I might be able to orient myself towards it if you say so. It would have advantage of avoiding all further reproach to France of "colonialism" while at same time giving response to Diem's request that France should go. Since it contemplates the liquidation of the situation and the repatriation of the FEC, would the United States be disposed to help protect French civilians and the refugees? 139/

Secretary Dulles repeated his awareness of Diem's weaknesses but did not agree with Faure's opinion. Diem "showed so much ability that US fails to see how he can be got rid of now...Diem is stronger now than when Bao Dai first withdrew his powers." Dulles said the worst aspect of the problem was the differences between France and the US: "Vietnam is not worth quarrel with France." Then he matched Faure's offer by saying the US would withdraw from Vietnam if that would solve the problem.

Choice open to us is to have Diem supported or to withdraw... US interest in Vietnam is simply to withhold area from communists. US will give consideration to any suggestion French make but must warn that US financial support may not be expected to any solution which (Dulles) can think of as alternative to Diem. 140/

Foreign Secretary MacMillan, calling British interests "more indirect but nonetheless vital because (1) interest in area itself and (2) interest in Communist threat from any area in world," made the obvious statement that a decision on Vietnam was too grave to be taken that evening. Faure and Dulles agreed. 141/

d. Dulles: Continue with Diem - but Independently of France

By May 11, when the three ministers reconvened, Dulles had received counsel from the JCS and General Collins. As was their wont, the Joint Chiefs of Staff offered no opinion about whether Diem should or should not be continued (a matter for "resolution at the governmental level") but then stated his government showed the "greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam." Addressing the military aspects of the problem, the Chiefs found neither withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps nor withdrawal of US military support acceptable. The Vietnamese National Army was considered incapable of maintaining internal security, even less able to resist outside aggression without outside military assistance. The US was barred by Geneva from increasing its forces either to defend Vietnam or to defend French civilians, other foreign nationals or refugees. Thus, although withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps is "ultimately to be desired," precipitate withdrawal at this time was not: it would "result in an increasingly unstable and precarious situation" and the eventual fall of South Vietnam to communism.

The Chiefs felt France alone would be unable to stabilize the situation, that the VNA would fall apart without "US moral and materiel support," and that the "best interest of France as well as the United States" warranted energetic action to restore internal order and prevent South Vietnam's loss to the free world. 142/

General Collins also opposed French withdrawal for three reasons: first, the FEC was responsible under the Manila Pact for the defense of Indochina and neither the US nor Britain were prepared to take over that responsibility. Secondly, French military assistance (logistical support and training) was essential to the development of the Vietnamese forces. Third, although the presence of French troops was a source of bitterness to the Vietnamese, General Collins believed the FEC was a stabilizing influence on Vietnamese politics. 143/

Dulles' proposal to Faure on May 11 reflected these judgments. Emphasizing that Indochina, for all its importance, must not be allowed to damage Franco-American relations, that US support for Diem must not be allowed to split the alliance, Dulles proposed that France continue to support Diem until a National Assembly could be elected to determine the ultimate political structure of South Vietnam, a structure which might or might not include Diem. 144/

Against his own views, against French public opinion and on certain conditions, Faure accepted the proposal. The Prime Minister insisted the Diem government be enlarged, elections be held as soon as possible, the sect problem be resolved, anti-French propaganda cease, Bao Dai be retained as chief of state, French and American officials deemed disturbing to Franco-US harmony be removed from Vietnam (Lansdale, for one) and that the US assure him French economic, cultural and financial relations with South Vietnam would be nurtured. Agreeing to these stipulations, Dulles added Diem was not a US puppet and he could not guarantee conditions involving Vietnamese action would be met. Then, saying the problem in Vietnam did not lend itself to a contractual agreement between France and the United States, Dulles suggested each should state its policy and proceed accordingly. In effect, said Dulles, the days of joint policy are over; the US will act (more) independently of France in the future. 146/

#### F. The Twilight of French Presence in Vietnam

Back in Vietnam, Diem was doing well. He had dealt the Binh Xuyen a coup de grace; the Army was pleased with its success against Bay Vien, supported Diem and rather relished the chance to continue the fight against remaining sect armies. Diem launched a campaign against the sect armies on May 8, to regain control of wayward provinces and solidify Saigon's control throughout the country. The US, again, gave Diem unqualified support and the French, again, reluctantly backed him. Bao Dai was a minor



threat; trying to overthrow Diem had been a blunder and his popularity was very low. On May 10, a relatively unknown group of "technicians" was named as Diem's cabinet, to function until elections for a national assembly (held on March 4, 1956). General Collins left Vietnam on May 14; Ambassador G. Frederick Reinhardt replaced him later in the month. And on June 2, General Ely's mission terminated. General Jacquot assumed military duties as Commissioner-General, duties which consisted primarily of supervising the increasingly rapid pace of the French military pull-out.

### 1. All-Vietnam Elections

Although political concessions made to the United States in May and economic and military actions taken before and after that time had reduced -- almost eliminated -- French presence and influence in Vietnam France still was obligated to carry out the provisions of the Geneva Accords. Under increasing pressure from French public opinion to give Hanoi no pretext for renewing hostilities as long as the French Expeditionary Corps remained in South Vietnam, the French Government urgently sought to persuade Diem to accept consultations about the elections scheduled to begin in July 1955. 146/ Britain wanted to prevent any public repudiation of the Accords and joined France in urging Diem to talk to the Vietminh. But Diem had not changed his view of the Accords: he had refused to sign them and continued to insist he was not bound by them. 147/

The United States stood between these extremes. A draft policy toward all-Vietnam elections -- finally produced in May 1955 -- held that to give no impression of blocking elections while avoiding the possibility of losing them, Diem should insist on free elections by secret ballot with strict supervision. Communists in Korea and Germany had rejected these conditions; hopefully the Vietminh would follow suit. 148/

Diem could not bring himself to sit down with the Vietminh. Consultations would give the appearance of having accepted the Geneva settlement; consultation with the Vietminh without the kind of Western backing given Rhee and Adenauer would be futile. 149/ On July 16, Diem said South Vietnam could "not consider any proposal from the Communists" without proof that they had mended their ways and were prepared to hold genuinely free elections. 150/ But another reason was Diem's belief that he could not represent a sovereign nation -- or be free of Vietminh propaganda charges of being a colonialist puppet -- until the French High Command and the French Expeditionary Corps were gone. 151/ Minister Nguyen Huu Chau was dispatched to Paris to negotiate the withdrawal of the FEC from Vietnam (except naval and air forces which Diem wanted under VNA command) and revision of economic, cultural and financial accords. 152/ Diem also wanted Vietnamese affairs transferred from the Ministry of Associated States to the French Foreign office; he insisted the post of High Commissioner be abolished and that Ely's successor (Henri Hoppenot) be credited as Ambassador.

## 2. Franco-Vietnamese Differences, Autumn 1955

France was anxious to get the FEC out of Vietnam (and into North Africa); the matter of turning the High Command over to the VNA was not a problem. Placing French units under Vietnamese command was a definite problem, however and domestic politics would not allow any immediate change of Vietnam's status within the French Union. 153/ Talks stalled until July. Diem accepted Ambassador Hoppenot (whose duties, if not title, were that of High Commissioner) and things moved a bit, then stopped when Diem arrested two French officers suspected of bombing electric power stations in Saigon and said they would be tried by Vietnamese courts. In October, France refused to talk unless the officers were released. 154/ The deadlock was finally broken by the French in December. Paris agreed the Quai d'Orsay would handle Vietnamese affairs, refused to accept the assignment of a diplomatic representative from the DRV to France and made it clear the Sainteny mission was in Hanoi solely for economic and cultural reasons. France had already recognized Vietnam as a Republic after Diem's resounding -- too resounding -- victory of 98 percent of the vote in an October popular referendum. Diem finally released the officers into French custody. 155/

But these concessions produced no improvement in French-Vietnam relations. In December, Diem suddenly terminated the economic and financial accords worked out at the Paris conference of 1954; mounting US activity fast drove the former colony from franc to dollar area and stringent commercial regulations applied to French businesses in South Vietnam forced already outraged entrepreneurs out of the country in increasing numbers. Diem laid down these conditions on which he would consider renewed relations with France. France had to

denounce the Geneva Agreements, to renounce to speak about the general elections in 1956, to approve openly and without reservation the policy of Mr. Diem, to break all relations with the Vietminh and of course to call home the Sainteny Mission.

Soon after this, Diem withdrew South Vietnamese representatives from the French Union Assembly. 156/

There was little France could do. Diem spoke for a government no longer dependent on French support, no longer near collapse. By February 1956, only 15,000 French troops remained in Vietnam and 10,000 of these were to be evacuated by the end of March. The High Command was abolished on April 26, 1956. The next month, the US Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) entered Vietnam and another 350 military personnel were added to the US advisory effort. Few French instructors remained at the TRIM.



### 3. What of French Obligations Under the Geneva Accords?

But an important question remained. Under the Geneva agreements France was responsible for protection and support of the International Control Commission; representatives of the People's Army of North Vietnam and France sat on the Joint Armistice Commission charged with ensuring provisions of the armistice agreement were met. France could not lightly cast off these obligations nor could France transfer them to South Vietnam: Diem denounced the Geneva accords and refused to be bound by them in any way.

In February, French Foreign Minister Pineau described the difficult French position as a result of certain conditions:

These are the independence granted to South Vietnam and the Geneva accords some provisions of which have up to date demanded and justified our presence in this country. 157/

Particularly difficult was the question of ICC support. Diem refused to associate South Vietnam openly with the ICC but did agree to assume responsibility for its servicing if France would leave a small mission in Vietnam to fulfill French obligations. 158/ Dulles liked this idea. His view was: "while we should certainly take no positive step to speed up present process of decay of Geneva Accords, neither should we make the slightest effort to infuse life into them." 159/

Eight months later, Diem finally relaxed his uncompromising stand against Geneva, agreed to respect the armistice and provide security for the ICC. In July 1956, Vietnam promised to replace the French liaison mission to the ICC. France maintained membership on the Joint Armistice Commission and continued to bear ICC expenses. 160/ But France was never able to meet Geneva obligations concerning the elections of 1956, for Diem matched his refusal to consult with the Vietminh about elections with an adamant refusal to ever hold them. Neither Britain nor the Soviet Union pressed the matter; the United States backed Diem's position.